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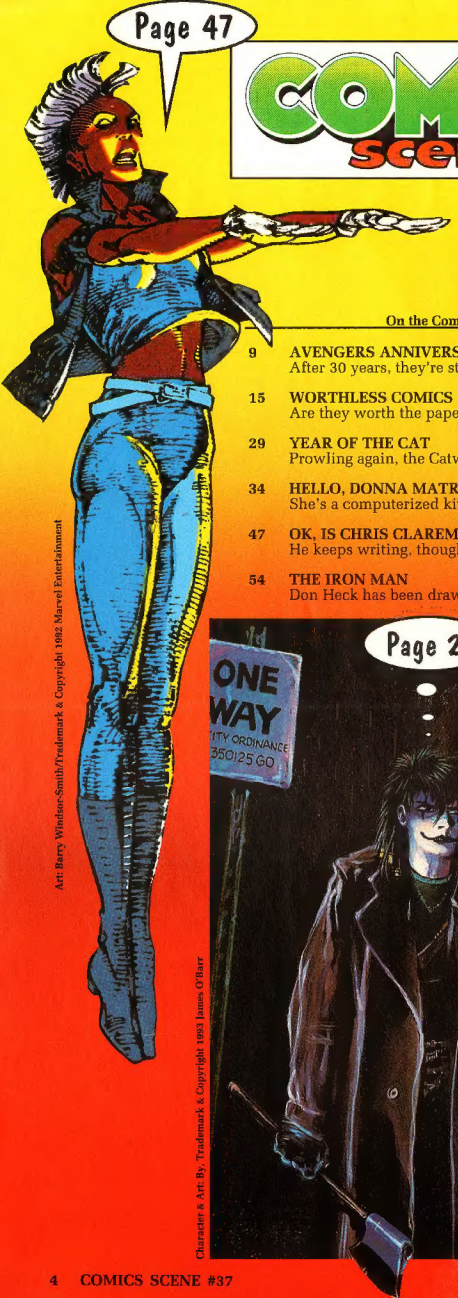

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COMICS scene

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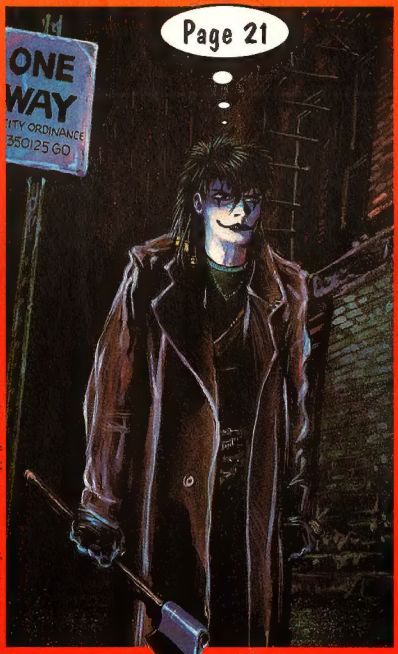

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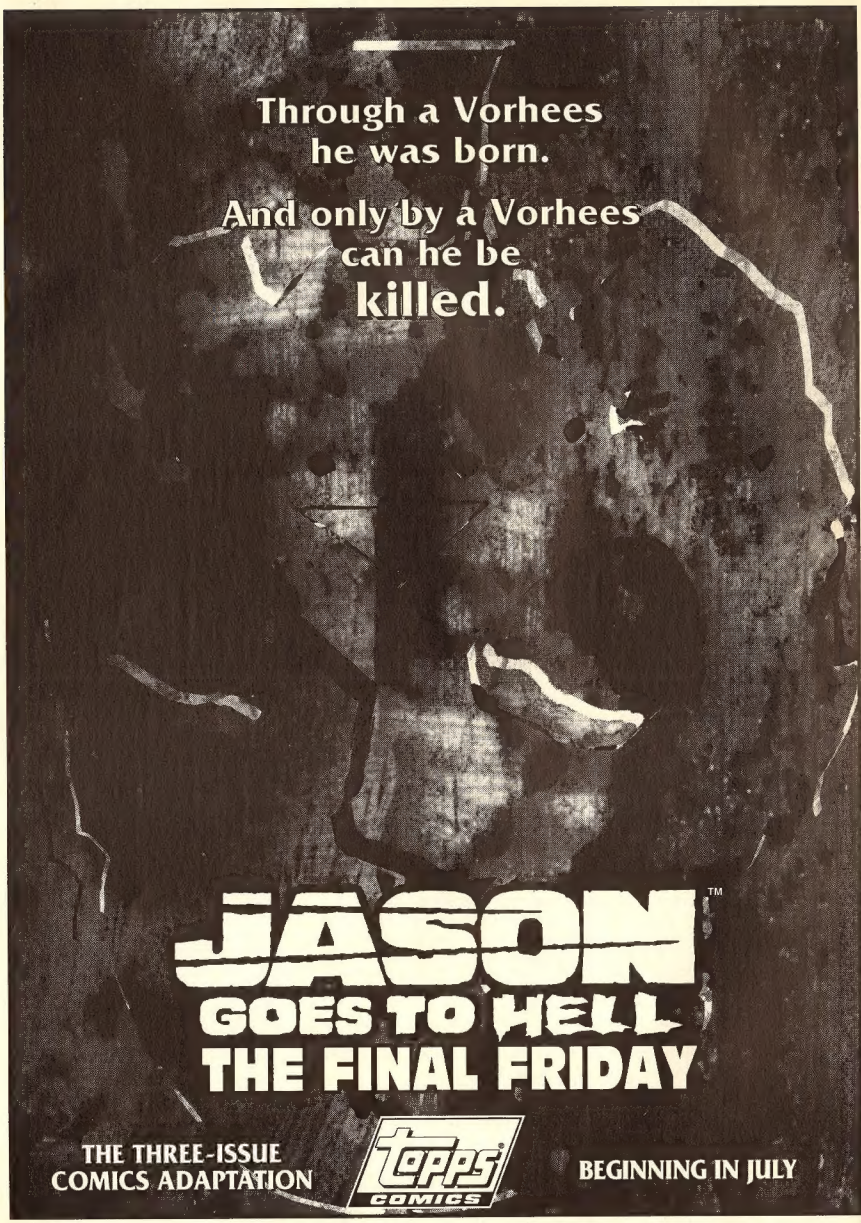

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WORD BALLOONS

Eternal Justifications

At times, there are articles I simply *don't* want to publish. OK, maybe the piece wasn't as well-written as it might be. Perhaps the interviewee wasn't all that articulate. Or the graphics—the accompanying photos and art—just aren't very nifty. And then, finally, there's one last reason—because the article is so achingly, terribly sad.

That's the case with one story this issue—the interview with Brandon Lee. I didn't really want to publish it—let me tell you why we did.

Brandon Lee, of course, was the action movie star, the son of kung fu legend Bruce Lee. Only 28 years old, he was killed while filming a movie death scene just five days after this interview was conducted. It was an accident, a great tragedy, a much-publicized "news event."

Everyone I know who had met Brandon Lee thought he was a nice guy. And that's the highest accolade we can give an interviewee.

In 1991, while also editing the short-lived ACTION HEROES, I sent Kyle Counts, a frequent COMICS SCENE contributor, off to the set of *Showdown in Little Tokyo* to interview the film's makers and its stars, Dolph Lundgren and Lee. Kyle reported back that Lee was actually a nice guy.

As that article saw print in ACTION HEROES #4, Lee was off to Chicago to star in *Rapid Fire* with *She-Wolf of London*'s Kate Hodge. I sent Chicago-based Kim Howard Johnson, a longtime friend and COMICS SCENE's Senior Contributing Writer, on location to interview the movie's makers, Hodge and Lee. Howard also reported back that Lee was a particularly nice guy.

The unit publicist on that movie was my old pal Terry Erdmann. As a part of the film's crew (charged, in fact, with publicizing it and dealing with all those hungry journalists), Terry got to see a side of Brandon Lee *not* presented to the public. Lee was *just the same*, a *really* nice guy.

Kim Howard Johnson's *Rapid Fire* story appeared in the renamed ACTION SUPER-HEROES #3 (then in other editorial hands) in 1992. It soon became clear that we would again be interviewing Brandon Lee. He was going to play *The Crow*. COMICS SCENE was one of the few—only?—magazines to do a major story on James O'Barr's *Crow* comic book. When studio licensing reps wanted to know more about the character, they called us for copies of that story to study. And because of that article, the publicity people were more than eager for COMICS SCENE to visit the set and cover the film.

I sent CS vet Dan Yakir off to the soundstages in North Carolina to see *The Crow*. And again, Dan (who previously interviewed the actor for another magazine) reported back that Lee was an especially nice guy.

Then, tragedy. And do we publish Lee's last interview or not?

From a historical perspective, we *had to*—it was his *last* chat with the press, one filled with eerie foreshadowing since, because of this comics-spawned film's subject matter, the talk frequently concerned death and resurrection. Lee even mentioned *not* yet getting hurt while doing *Crow* stunts. In light of later events, some of his comments also take on a truly ironic poignance. It's almost an interview from *The Twilight Zone*.

Of course, there *are* commercial considerations. I *do* know what sells magazines. So do you. Tabloid headlines—like those seen at the supermarket checkouts—grab attention and sales. Sex. Hot trends. Tragedy.

But I didn't want to do that. Historically, I feel an obligation to run the story. But as a human being, I can't, I simply don't want to be party to the exploitation of a tragedy, the death of a nice guy.

It took a conversation with Terry Erdmann to finalize matters. Of my four friends, Terry, needless to say, knew Brandon Lee best. He attended the memorial service. And he told me what helped me make the decision to print, whether that's right, wrong or merely rationalization.

At the service, Terry talked with Linda Lee Cadwell, Brandon's mother. Despite her grief, she wanted to know more about her son's work. She wanted to see more of the many studio photos taken for *Rapid Fire*. And she and the entire family wanted *The Crow* finished and released, because Brandon Lee considered it "his best work." (Ultimately, the film *is* being finished. Reshoots are complete, and a fall release date has been discussed.) Keeping all this in mind, Terry believes that this interview is one that Linda Lee Cadwell would want to see printed, that it's one she would want to *read*.

That's why we've published it. And because Brandon Lee was a nice guy.

—David McDonnell/Editor

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COMICS SCENE RETURNS with **Gil Kane, Don Heck** and the **Fantastic Four** film next time. Look for **COMICS SCENE #38 on sale August 24, 1993.**

LETTERING

Personal replies are **impossible**. Other fans & advertisers may contact readers whose letters are printed here. To **avoid** this, mark your letter "Please Withhold My Address." Otherwise, we retain the option to publish it. Write.
COMICS SCENE
475 Park Avenue So., 8th Flr.
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...Some advice for Bruce Timm before combing his hair for the next page 20 photo. He should put some time-aside and watch TNT's *A Tribute to Bugs' Bunny*. He would find that not one person in the Warner Bros. line-up takes *all* of the credit for a job well done. However, he seems to prefer to be left alone by Warner Bros. He may have been the brain behind *Batman: The Animated Series*, but he is not the backbone. I must question why some egos must always step on the backs of others to receive a pat on their own.

Some of the *Batman* episodes showed obvious influences of inspired Japanese animation. Fine. The Japanese take pride in everything they produce, and it's an attractive style. Not so for Timm. And I'm sure that others will agree that *Johnny Quest* is still advanced for this time. One or two episodes that I've seen of the animated *Batman* are, however, crude and pale in comparison to the best *Quest* episodes. Were readers like myself also left wondering whether Timm praised or loathed Max and Dave Fleischer's animated adventures of Superman?

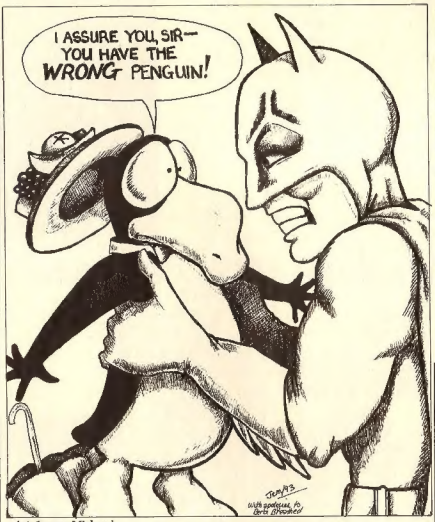
Frank Miller and Tim Burton were each successful in their interpretations of the Dark Knight, and though Timm may have enjoyed the movie, why was it important that he state he didn't believe the movie was how Batman *should* be? Or his emphasis on how Burton shouldn't be credited for the animated *Batman*? The movie was closer to Bob Kane's original premise than the animated series. And shouldn't Kane be the final judge?

Being a very particular Batman collector, I still enjoy the series' better episodes. And I will continue to watch it, aware that the nameless are striving to continue the mythos. Though I must wonder why Paul Dini didn't share writing credit with Steve Englehart on "The Laughing Fish" episode. The story was far too similar to Englehart's "Laughing Fish" and "Sign of the Joker" and Denny O'Neil's "Joker's Five Way Revenge" for them not to receive credit.

In closing, Timm claims that he's growing tired of Batman and wants to move on. Well, show him the door.

Jaimz Anthony Lucero
9241 Ustick Road
Boise, ID 83704

"The Laughing Fish" was based on Englehart and O'Neil's stories. They were credited as the authors of the original *stories.*



Art: Juanne Michaud

SAYS HERE THAT SOMEONE IS WORKING ON A LIVE-ACTION FEATURE FILM VERSION OF CLUTCH CARGO. THEY'VE HIRED ZEMECKIS TO DIRECT AND KRICFALUSI TO ANIMATE THE LIPS...
COMICS SCENE

Art: Robert J. Bennett

Art: Adam Dekraker

...I think it's a real shame the way DC has dealt with my "favrit" (as Bibbo says), Superman. It's bad enough they had to kill him, but now we have the Kryptonian equivalent of the Brady Bunch. And *not one* original character in the bunch! A super-kid, an Iron Man rip-off, the cold-blooded Kryptonian (gee, we've never seen *that* before) and, joy of joys, a cyborg! You would think that all these "creative geniuses" could come up with something better than this.

And in regards to Mike Carlin's statement, "Many people were mad at us for killing Superman; it's not that we don't care that they're mad, but if they really cared about Superman, they would have been buying his comics all along." The key words here are "buying his comics." That's what this is all about. Mr. Carlin, we really *do* care about Superman, and if you and the folks at DC had been producing good stories, we would have been buying all along, and you wouldn't have had to resort to these cheap tactics to sell the books.

It's a shame, really. One likes to think that the people who produce our favorite comics *care* about the characters. But, after all, this is the real world, not Metropolis. I am curious though, about what the plans are for the next sales drop. Superman becomes a steel-clawed mutant, perhaps?

Greg Jarnigan
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Team Player

By HARLEY JEBENS

●

"I always start from character," says Bob Harras, writer of Marvel's *Avengers* series and editor of the X-family of books: *X-Men*, *X-Factor* and *X-Force*. "Any book is successful, in my mind, because of character. I mean, art, yes, is very important. But if it's not a book about people you care about, you're *not* going to have a book.

"*The Avengers* has had great artists—like Neal Adams and John Buscema—for years. Tom Palmer has been inking the book for a long time, and I think his look is very distinctive. But the thing about the Avengers is that initially, it was about Captain America, the Hulk, your standard 'Oh, here all these guys have their own titles and they're getting together in their own book' series. Then it changed very quickly, when it became about Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch, Hawkeye and Cap. And I think *that* was when it became really interesting, because it was a book about people you didn't see before. And it was about their lives.

"As *Avengers* evolved, as more heroes came and went, you got the sense that it was a very big deal to be an Avenger, to be a part of this little group of people who were very, very cohesive and very dedicated to one another. And I think the readers got into that and really enjoyed it. The book may have lost some of its popularity, when that sense of being an Avenger being special got lost as well."

Harras says, "To my mind, in the Marvel Universe, the Fantastic Four and the Avengers are the most famous superheroes. The Avengers appear on the cover of *People*, because they're the superheroes that everyone likes. Whereas, the X-Men and those characters are the ones that people just whisper about, and they aren't quite sure they really exist.

"So, the Avengers, on one level, are the paparazzi superheroes, the user-friendly superheroes. On another level, they are, or should be, the group that new heroes, or even some older characters, *aspire* to belong to, because

All Art: Steve Epting/Tom Palmer

Re-assembling the Avengers is a task that delights Bob Harras.

ALL RIGHT, TROOPS! WE'RE IN!
NOW, LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE SWORDSMAN, FOR THE VISION--
--AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!
KINDA CORNY, BUT STILL EFFECTIVE.

All Avengers Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Marvel Entertainment Group

Harras hopes to make *The Avengers* "more 'avenging,' instead of defensive."

it's kind of a unique grouping. If you become an Avenger, in some ways, you've made it in the superhero set.

"There can be a downside to that for reader identification as well. Because if the Avengers have everything, why read about them? They have this mansion on Manhattan's East Side. They have this quinjet. They are presented as famous people; they have it all. And there's nothing more boring to me than people who have it all. So, what you do is create, in character, tensions among them where you see that even among people who supposedly do 'have it all,' there are problems. You give them a handicap."

It seems appropriate to take a look back over Avengers history at this point to try to understand what makes them special, to see what makes being an Avenger such a big deal. For it was 1963 when Stan Lee and Jack Kirby had a backfiring scheme of the villainous Loki draw the Incredible Hulk, Thor, Iron Man, Ant-Man and the Wasp together to form the Mighty Avengers (#1). Shortly thereafter, the founding members left. But by that time, Captain America had been pulled from his icy imprisonment (#4), and he became leader of the new team (#16).

Since then, members have joined and left, and the romance between the Vision and Wanda Maximoff blos-

"Building up the Knight-Cap, not rivalry so much as a difference of opinion, is my goal," says Bob Harras.

I AM SO SICK AND TIRED OF YOU LORDING OVER THE REST OF US, ROGERS!
WHO DIED AND MADE YOU KING OF THE HILL, HUH? WHO?!
DANE...?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, AVENGER?
LET'S TALK THIS OUT AND--

somed into marriage and withered away when the Vision's personality was taken from him. Quicksilver's petulant nature and jealousy flared into hatred as he became a foe of the Avengers for a time. Readers have witnessed the bickering between Captain America and Hawkeye over the team's leadership, and have seen Hawkeye grow to the point where he could command the respect of an entire team of West Coast Avengers. Founding members have returned to the team, and left again. Mantis joined the Avengers, precipitating a romantic quadrangle whose corners were she, the Swordsman, the Scarlet Witch and the Vision. Then, Mantis earned the team the enmity of the time-traveling conqueror Kang because she, as the Celestial Madonna, was destined to give birth to the most powerful being in the universe.

Good stories about interesting characters. That's what drew Harras to the Avengers as a reader, and that's what he tries to put into his own tales. So it should come as no surprise that the yarns Harras spins echo classic Avengers storylines.

"The Vision and his relationship with the Scarlet Witch was something that I came back to month after month," he recalls. "Mantis and the Swordsman—that whole storyline was amazing. The Kree-Skrull War was, to my mind, one of the best stories ever. These were good stories about interesting characters, and I don't think you can beat that."

Even though the line-up of Harras' Avengers—Captain America, Vision, Black Knight, Hercules, Sersi, Black Widow and Crystal—is quite different than that of Avengers assemblages of yore, Harras is drawing on the team's past to forge their future in their 30th anniversary year.

"The quintessential Avenger in everybody's mind is Captain America, because he believes in the team so much. But, to my mind, the Vision is a character who is so much a part of the Avengers that sometimes he's overlooked. Sometimes you also overlook just *why* Captain America is the quintessential Avenger. He came back from World War II, he was awakened, and the Avengers were his life rope in a way. They gave his life focus.

"And what I'm toying around with is the fact that, yes, the Avengers are very important to Steve Rogers because they gave him sanity when he came back. But at some point, people in this group may say, 'But we don't want to be your focus. We want to move on.' I think you must look at things like the quintessential Avenger and say, 'Why is he the quintessential Avenger? Why does he feel so strongly about them?' And you play around with that.

"Frankly, if I had come into a team like the Avengers and there was some guy like Cap who was always telling me what the team meant, I would finally have to say, 'Well, let me tell you what it means to *me*. I have as valid a point as you do, Cap.' That's important to start dealing with.

"Same thing with the Vision. Here's a man, or an android actually, who has been with the Avengers almost nonstop since he was first created. And you have to think, 'Why is he with

Magneto is a major player in the *Avengers/X-Men* crossover.

them?' Yes, he was with them for a while because of Wanda. And now that's over, or for now it's over. Now, you have to explore why he's *still* with the group. Is it because there's no one else out there who will accept him? Is it because of friendship? If you start thinking about that, you realize you have stories to tell about these characters."

According to Harras, being part of the Avengers has a specific meaning for each member.

"For the Vision, I think the team is an anchor," he says. "He really feels that there is no existence for him. He's a very lonely character. In some ways, he's almost afraid of leaving the Avengers. He has had no definition of his existence outside the team.

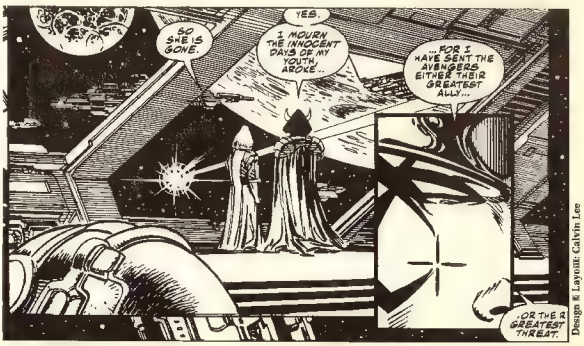
"Hercules enjoys the fellowship. It's almost a reminder to him of, say, the Argonauts. He was involved in myth, and this is an echo of that. He feels very much that they are a noble fellowship. Hercules has an epic view of things.

"I put Crystal in there because I think she was trying to make amends for the mistakes she has made in her life. I brought her in because I wanted someone fresh in the book to whom this was all new, yet who also had been an established Marvel character, and show what it was like to join the Avengers, and what ripple effects her joining would have on others. To my mind, she joined to make a statement about her life, to say, 'Look, I'm back on the straight and narrow. I'm really a nice person.' And now she's staying for other reasons. Maybe because she's interested in Dane [Whitman, the Black Knight]. Or maybe she just wants to get away from her family. Her reasons are a little more 'selfish' in a way. She's there for her own sake.

"The Black Widow is there almost as Captain America's replacement when he's gone, the older character who has been through it all, who doesn't go on missions as much as the other characters because she's just outclassed power-wise. She's more the tactician, the technical adviser, the military analyst. She's the cool, calm one.

"I think the Black Knight is hanging out there to get his head straight. He doesn't quite know what he's going to

Sending Deathcry to Earth, Lilandra wants to help the Avengers. It may not work out that way.


YES.
SO SHE IS GONE.
I MOURN THE INNOCENT DAYS OF MY YOUTH, ARCHE...
FOR I HAVE SENT THE AVENGERS EITHER THEIR GREATEST ALLY...
...OR THEIR GREATEST THREAT.

Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

do with his life. He has been messed up a lot over the years. He went back in time to the Crusades. He was a stone statue for years. He has had a messed-up love life. He's the guy saying, 'I'm going to make my mark. This is where I'm going to stay. I'm going to have a focus. Maybe I'll reshape the team in *my* image.'

"Building up the Knight-Cap, not rivalry so much as a difference of opinion, is my goal. Because Cap is kind of the old guard. And the Knight, to my mind, is the new guard. Who's right? Who's wrong? Are they both right?"

Harras says, "This is always a sticky point for me—what are the Avengers? What do they actually do? Do they avenge anything? Are they just a superhero club? You know, what are they? It's good for the characters to start asking that question and see what comes out of that. So, maybe the Avengers will be tougher. Maybe they'll be more 'avenging,' instead of being a defensive group. And that's what I think the basis of the Knight-Cap discussions will be: 'What exactly do we do here? Where are we going?' We are presenting the real world in the Marvel Universe, and the real world is becoming a darker, more dangerous place. The Avengers are going to have to figure out how to respond to that. We'll get away a little bit from the 'paparazzi superhero' image.

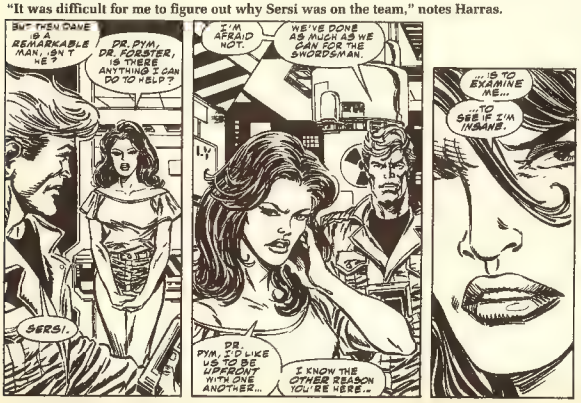
"It was difficult for me to figure out why Sersi was on the team. It didn't fit her character in anything I had seen before. That's why I wrote her out for a couple of months. She would disappear. Then, I came up with this storyline where she may be starting to go a little wacko. She's there now because she finds Dane attractive, and she's scared about what's happening to her. And she has never particularly liked her Eternal relatives.

The Gatherers were brought up against the Avengers because they "don't really have that great a cast of villains."

"To some degree, they're all finding this group of Avengers as a type of secondary family."

A Captain America-Black Knight clash over the team's direction harks back to the Cap-Hawkeye conflicts of earlier days; a Sersi-Black Knight-Crystal-Quicksilver romantic situation echoes the Scarlet Witch-Vision-Mantis-Swordsman relationship of Steve Englehart's 1970s tenure as *Avengers* scribe. Harras puts his own spin on elements that made the Avengers successful in the past; he's re-fashioning them for today's audience.

"It was difficult for me to figure out why Sersi was on the team," notes Harras.


BUT THEN DANE IS A REMARKABLE MAN, ISN'T HE?
DR. PYM, DR. FORSTER, IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP?
SERSI.
I'M AFRAID NOT.
WE'VE DONE AS MUCH AS WE CAN FOR THE SWORDSMAN.
DR. PYM, I'D LIKE US TO BE UPFRONT WITH ONE ANOTHER...
I KNOW THE OTHER REASON YOU'RE HERE...
...IS TO EXAMINE ME...
...TO SEE IF I'M INSANE.

Take the Gatherers, for instance. They're a group of super-powered beings from alternate worlds, all of whom—Magdalene, Cassandra, Sloth and their leader Proctor, who claims to be Sersi's husband—have their own reasons to hate the Avengers. One of the Gatherers' members was an alternate world version of the Swordsman, who, in the Marvel Universe, was slain by Kang years ago. Another Gatherer was an alternate world Vision, a Vision far more human—and far more malicious and licentious—than any more familiar android.

And with *The Avengers* in coming months, "The problems with Sersi are definitely going to be resolved," Harras says. "That's definitely building to a head, and coming to a conclusion, along with the Proctor storyline. Those

things are very linked. We're going to see why some things have happened, and hopefully there will be a little bit of a surprise, that not everything is as it has seemed so far.

"I'm going to do stuff with Hercules and Taylor Madison, developing that relationship. I haven't really had the chance to get too much into that. And I want to explore what Hera's revenge on Hercules is. I don't think anyone has really caught on to what it is. That has definitely been planned from the first issue—why Taylor Madison was introduced in the same issue as Hera; what Hera's revenge is. That's down the line."

In order to keep a comic book fresh, Harras says, "You must redefine it every few years, update the look and feel of the characters. You have to look at what's happening in the world out there and say, 'Are these characters still as fresh as they were back then?' The Avengers constantly change because of membership rotation. That kept it exciting. If it's done too much, you lose reader connection, and reader fall-off begins. But even on the Avengers, you've gotta nowadays say, 'OK, what are readers interested in? What do people like out there in the "real world"?' and try to bring that into the book. You change costumes and update looks. You make sure that no one, hopefully, is in the same place they were a year ago in a story, because then you *are* stale, you *are* tired.

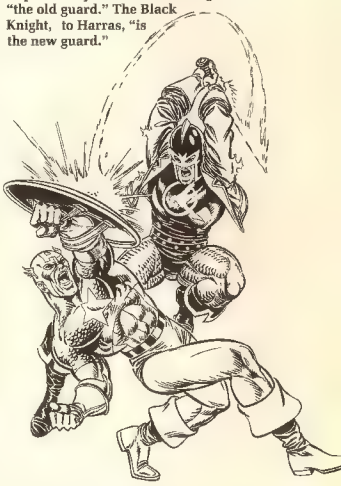
"Some people are definitely going to be written out of the series, because that's the nature of the Avengers. By January, this Sersi-Proctor-Knight-Crystal storyline will have a definitive ending. At that point, it may be time to bring some new characters in. It has been a pretty stable line-up for about 18 months now, which I think is a record for the Avengers in the last few years. We're going to play with that.

"There will be developments with Crystal and Quicksilver this fall [in the Avengers/X-Men crossover that sees the two teams in conflict with Fabian Cortez and the Acolytes of Magneto], with Magneto, and with Luna [Crystal and Quicksilver's daughter]. Fabian Cortez is, of course, the man who betrayed Magneto back in *X-Men* #1-#3. The X-Men's 30th anniversary this year is the return of Magneto, who isn't dead. Big surprise—he has been hiding out. Cortez panics; he needs something to defend himself against Magneto. Cortez will use anything he can as almost a human shield, as a bargaining chip against Magneto. One of the things that seems fairly obvious to him is Luna, Magneto's grandchild. That will set in motion this team-up between the X-Men and the Avengers. And since Quicksilver has been involved with both teams, he's a natural focal point.

"*That* story will have a major impact on the Black Knight's relationship with Crystal, and that will lead to a decision on his part in December, which will, hopefully, be really gut-wrenching and shocking, if all goes according to plan.

"Right now we're bringing in this character from the Shi'ar, Deathcry. She's sent by Lilandra to Earth to defend the Avengers against a new Kree plan. Because the Avengers are going to pay the price of what happened in the Galactic Storm for a long time, when they were part of the Supreme Intelligence's assassination. Deathcry is related in some way to Lilandra and there's a reason why Lilandra sent her to Earth. On one level, it was like, 'Oh yes, I want to help the Avengers. They need someone to defend them against the Kree.' And the other reason may be that Lilandra just wants her out of the Shi'ar Empire.

Cap is "the quintessential Avenger" but also "the old guard." The Black Knight, to Harras, "is the new guard."



"We're going to see what the reaction is to the Swordsman. I brought the Swordsman in as a character in the Gatherers, and the reaction was pretty positive. So I'm toying around with him; what are we going to do with him next? Do we write him out or what?

"We'll be bringing in new menaces as well. The Avengers don't really have that great a cast of villains. If you

(continued on page 66)

Proctor and Sersi's story will have a definite end. Then, enter new characters.

PROCTOR CLAIMS TO BE OUR FELLOW AVENGER'S HUSBAND.
I AM HER EARTH LOVE! HER ONLY TRUE SOULMATE!
AND THUS, I KNOW WHY EVERY F.B.I. OF MY BEING THAT SHE MUST DIE!

THE ART OF H. R. GIGER

The Man Who Has Changed The Look of Science Fiction

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Introduction by Timothy Leary

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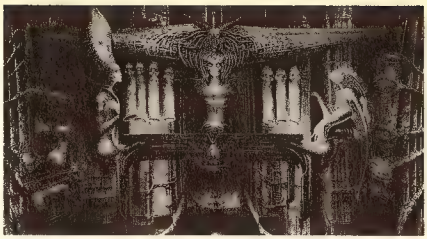

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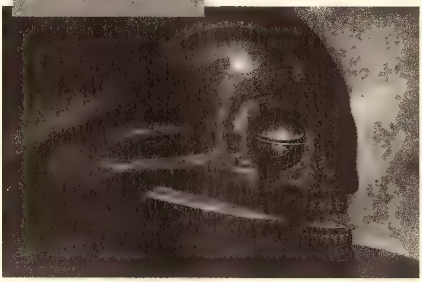

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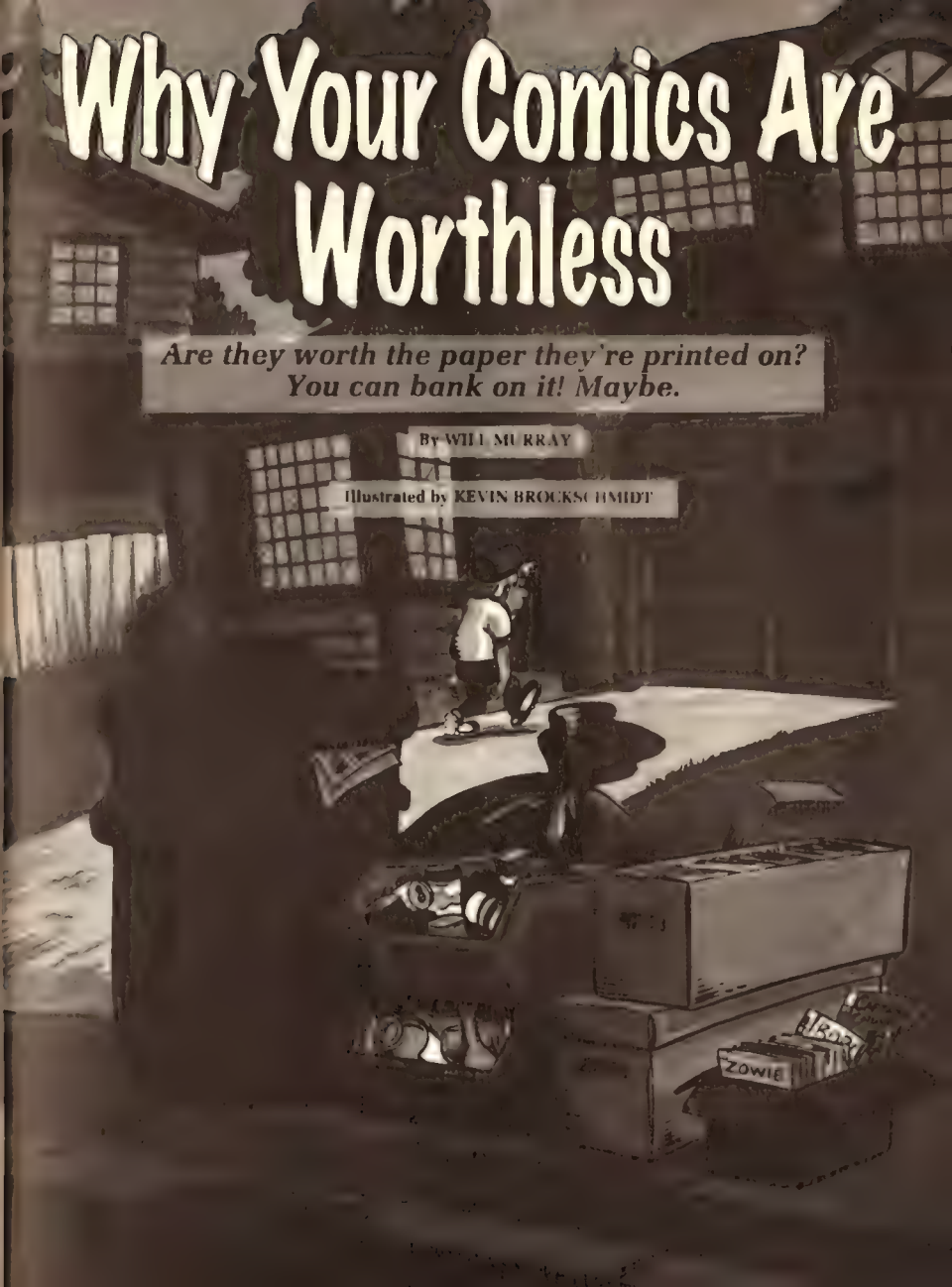
Why Your Comics Are Worthless

Are they worth the paper they're printed on? You can bank on it! Maybe.

By WILL MURRAY

Illustrated by KEVIN BROCKSCHMIDT



Your comic book collection may be virtually worthless—and there's *nothing* you can do about it!

Absurd? Preposterous? Impossible? Then consider these facts:

The comic book is 60 years old this decade. For 40 of those years, comic book back issues were almost universally considered to be worth less money—usually half the cover price—than brand new issues. That's right. Half the "value" evaporates once it goes off sale. This was true right up into the mid-1960s, when the first comics dealers began issuing lists, and continued to be true far into the 1970s for the average fan and retailer.

Well, you say, that was then and this is now. This is the 1990s. Things are different, and people have wised up to the true value of comic books. Ask any dealer of older comics. The days of being able to score a nice Golden or Silver Age collection some little old lady discovered in her attic are virtually over. Thanks to media coverage, *everybody* knows old comics are worth *serious* bucks.

You must only go back to the late 1980s for the most recent time when comics collectors—speculators really—woke up one morning to discover that their bagged and backed multiple copies of *Superhot Comics* #1 had evaporated in value virtually overnight. Melted down to below cover price, even *below* the wholesale price they paid for it! To understand how it could happen to you, let's first establish the basics of comic book values.

They are, in the absolute sense, completely meaningless.

Shocked?

There is no absolutely irreducible, rock bottom value to *any* comic book. It's all consensual, a social pact. Because there is an "official" price guide, and most everyone agrees with the *Price Guide*'s figures, its prices—and remember, they're only guidelines—are universally accepted. Should this mutual consent ever falter, should faith in those guidelines collapse, those prices will go into freefall.

Doubt it? Try an experiment. Go out on the street and accost someone who doesn't collect comics, and has no solid idea of comic book values. Offer him the most valuable comic book in your collection at one-tenth *Guide*.

Nine out of 10 people will refuse you. Sure, some may balk because they think you're trying to pull a fast one, but the true reason most people will pass up such an astounding "bargain" is simple: The comic book has no obvious intrinsic value—to them, it's just a comic book. Something to read and throw away, if that.

On the other hand, if you were offering a wristwatch at a good price, you would have many more takers. Why? Even if Joe Average doesn't need a new watch, he understands that a watch has value and utility, and most people won't pass up a good bargain.

There are many people out there who couldn't care less about comics, valuable or otherwise, and they outnumber those who do. This means that more people will either shake their heads in wonderment, or laugh those same heads off when you proudly show off your pristine mint *Spawn* #1 and boast of its current book value, than those who'll envy you on your wise "investment."

Even among professional comics dealers, there is disagreement about comics values. I know Golden Age dealers who hold the entire Silver Age market in utter contempt, believing that only Golden Age books are truly

rare enough to command serious money. I also know Silver Age dealers who consider the current feeding frenzy for *X-Men*, Image and Valiant comics ridiculous. These comics are already being hoarded in huge numbers for later resale. Where are the future purchasers?

And there are those who believe that the only real money to be made in comics these days, when every little old lady assumes the copy of *Heckle and Jeckle* #1 she discovered rolled up in her eaves must be worth a bundle, is to buy new comics at wholesale and sell them above cover price.

Who's right and who's wrong?

One of the deepest, darkest secrets of the comics field is that many of the most expensive titles on the market pass from dealer to dealer in complicated cash-and-book trades. These are the older books, primarily Golden Agers, but Silver Age titles move this way, too. And official *Overstreet Price Guide* prices are often based on these dealer-to-dealer trades.

Many more expensive comics than you might think have assigned values based on being sold once at a certain price—or merely being offered at that price. And just because one person was willing to pay $6,000 for *Red Raven Comics* #1, for example, doesn't mean there are *any* others who crave it *that* much.

George Santayana said, "Those who do not study history are condemned to repeat it." The entire pricing system for comics could burst like a bubble—just like the Netherlands' tulipmania of the 1630s, when the Dutch drove up tulip bulb prices in a frenzy of speculation to the point where certain bulbs were worth their weight in gold. One speculator actually sold his *house* in order to buy *one* tulip bulb. Until someone jumped up and said, "Hey, they're only seeds!" One sane voice—and the market collapsed utterly.

The Dutch had a word for such commercial insanity: *windhandel*—"trading in the wind."

But tulip bulbs aren't comics, you say. True—so let's use a more appropriate example. You don't remember the dime novel, your father probably doesn't remember the dime novel, but his grandfather certainly would. They flourished at the end of the last century, and were that era's equivalent of the comic book. They featured heroes like Nick Carter, Frank Merriwell, Buffalo Bill and Jesse James.

Dime novels died out early in the 20th century, but they experienced a revival in the Roaring '20s. Adults, growing nostalgic for their childhoods—as adults invariably do with the onset of middle age—began seeking them out in an effort to recapture their far-off youth. Since they were considered trashy, disposable reading, few had saved their copies. Dime novels were hard to find. Demand outpaced supply, and soon they were selling for *real* money.

People started publishing fanzines. *The Dime Novel Roundup*, launched in 1925, continues to this day. By the 1940s, dime novel prices were peaking to about $4 or $5 for most titles—and considerably higher for special items. Doesn't sound like much? In those days, it was unheard of. And $5 back then equates to about $50 today.

Dime novel collecting flourished for three decades. But in the 1950s, it collapsed. Why? The generation that had grown up collecting dime novels began to die off, and there were very few younger people who were interested—not nearly enough to support 1940s prices. Without the continued demand by newcomers, scarcity and supply became irrelevant.

Today, dime novels are scarcer than ever. But when you can find them, they can be had for $4 to $5—exactly their 1940s prices! Allowing for inflation, the actual value of dime novels had fallen by more than a factor of 10! Just like tulip bulbs. Except that when you plant tulip bulbs, you get a return in tulips.

It can't happen to comics, I hear you mutter. There's too much money invested—the stakes are too high. Well, the stakes are much higher in the very speculative stock market—and it's crashed *several* times this century. And let's not forget that stock prices are *regulated*. Prices may fluctuate, but if Marvel Entertainment stock is trading at $28 a share on Monday, that's the price you pay. Comic books exchange hands every day for prices above and below *Guide*. It's neither a buyer's nor a seller's market.

Should there be a major price correction, forcing *Overstreet* to retreat on prices, make no mistake: It could be the end of *Overstreet*—and investing in comics. The *Price Guide* sells tons of copies every year only because investors, dealers and collectors alike are hot to see how much their stash has appreciated over the prior 12

months. When prices fall, the pyramid will collapse, just as it has in sports cards and real estate.

Don't kid yourself. It *can* happen in comics. Because it has before.

You needn't go back more than six years to see the future of the speculation frenzy that's now in full swing. It was called the Great Black & White Implosion, and it detonated in summer 1987. It devastated countless dealers, writers, artists and publishers.

I know; I had a ringside seat for the carnage. Like many, I was oblivious to the gathering storm. In those days, I was running comic book conventions in Boston. It's not hard to set up a comics con. You rent hotel space, advertise and the fans will come; out of curiosity the first time, and every time thereafter if you put on a good show.

The trick is to get the dealers. At the time I launched my show in January 1986, Boston had been bereft of a monthly con for more than two years. Area fans were starved, and dealers were more than happy to pour in from virtually every New England state, and even as far away as Florida and Toronto. I had a waiting list of dealers eager to do my show.

I didn't know it, but my show was built on a foundation of high-risk speculation. I didn't know it because I didn't set up at my own shows. I wasn't a dealer, I was a writer moonlighting as a convention promoter.

The first year was very profitable. The second started off that way. At that time, the hot comics were *X-Men*, *G.I. Joe*, *Daredevil*, *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen* and an incredible profusion of black & white titles produced by a growing army of independent publishers. Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* had burst on the scene two years before. They were hot, licensed and on their way to becoming multi-millionaires, because they were talented enough to create a unique concept, brave enough to publish it themselves and smart enough to promote it intelligently. The rest followed so fast it was scary—but inspiring.

Everyone with a few thousand dollars and the yen to publish their own comic thought they were going to be the next Eastman and Laird. And the titles poured forth. *Adolescent Radioactive Black Belt Hamsters*, *Fish Police*, *Gnatrat*. Investors had no way to tell which title might be the next *TMNT*, so they bought multiple copies of *everything* in sight. At the peak of the glut, an avalanche of unreadable crud poured forth.

Reasoning behind the speculation frenzy was simple. Independent print runs were very small, so titles were scarce. If you bought them when they came out, you could turn them around within weeks for some multiple of the cover price to the poor fanboys who had missed that issue. And many dealers did. It was a low-cost way to get into comics speculation for those who couldn't afford to invest in vintage Marvels, and then wait for them to appreciate.

The problem with this logic was simple. Print runs were low because orders—even inflated by frenzied speculation—were low. And too many copies of those low runs were going to hoarders. If there weren't enough readers to support *Elflord*'s issues, there was no way readership could be built up and demand increase.

Overnight, the fever broke. I found this out when I began calling my dealers to support *Elflord*'s early issues, there was no way readership could be built up and demand increase. they were hoarding were the comics most of their competition hoarded, too. Fans, upset at being frozen out of the ground floor of new titles, refused to pay triple cover price for a week-old issue of a cheap, fanzine-quality title. The rack glut became a dealer glut.

The bubble bursting, dealers dumped their stocks, but to no avail. There were no readers for many of these books. Stores with too much cap-

ital tied up in unwanted books folded, undercapitalized dealers went out of business. Companies too. I shut down my show after limping through a lackluster 1988. I can still remember one dealer plaintively telling me that he was storing his multiple copies in his basement until the market returned.

He's still waiting.

Virtually no comic book published specifically to cash in on the black & white craze that appreciated in value in the short term has held onto that value today—a mere six years later. Yet some are quite scarce now. You can't find them in comic shops or at conventions, and there's a good reason for that: No one wants them. Thus, they're worth less than the mylar bags that protect their "value."

If it happened to 1987 speculators who were stockpiling books destined by their very print runs to be scarce, it will surely happen to the people sitting on a tiny fraction of the six-figure print runs of today's ultra-hot comics. Count on it.

So, what makes a comic book valuable? That depends on the comic, who published it and when. And most importantly, who *wants* it.

The very earliest comics, those published before 1945, are quite hard to find. Even those which had large print runs. Why? Simple. During World War II, paper drives collected huge quantities of these crude gems and mulched them into other products. This is why some Golden Age dealers scoff at the "scarcity" of Silver Age comics. No voracious paper drives swallowed 90 percent of the original *Amazing Spider-Man* runs.

Comics that feature characters still published or remembered today are valuable, because new readers come along every year and want to read or own the older issues. Collectors make that market, just as they did with dime novels and tulip bulbs.

There are many Golden Age comics that have book values, but which almost no one wants. If someone offered you a *Blazing Comics* #1 featuring the origin of the Green Turtle at one quarter *Guide*, would you still be willing to shell out $50 for it? Not unless you had a customer eager to buy it from you at full *Guide*.

Yet there are Golden Age books that have great historical value. *Action* #1. *Detective* #39. *Marvel Comics* #1. *Captain America* #1. These will undoubtedly be worth something even if the collectors' market vanishes. Why? Because universities—today the only still active market for the few surviving dime novel dealers—will probably start acquiring them as historical pieces of Americana. Trouble is, universities *don't pay* collectors' prices.

A combination of scarcity, demand and condition makes a comic worth significant money. Generally, comics published before 1970 (the year the Silver Age of Comics is generally supposed to have ended) are more valuable than those published afterward. That's not because they're older, but due to the fact that by 1970, collectors and casual readers stopped throwing out their comics.

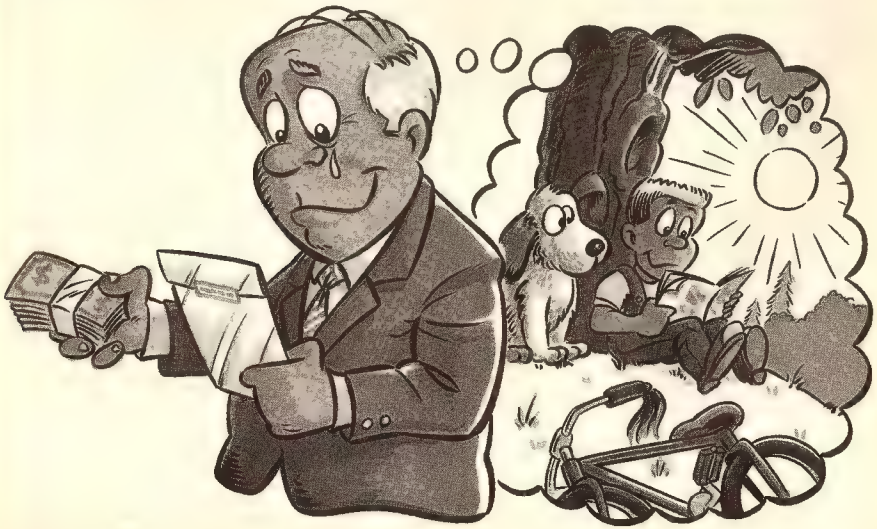
Even so, the average run-of-the-mill Silver Age comic is today only worth about six bucks, according to the dealers I polled. Not a bad return on a 10 or 12-cent investment? Think again. Due to inflation, the 12-cent comic today costs about $1.25. That's a 1,000 percent inflationary markup. If you bought a comic for 12 cents in 1963 and it's now worth $6, your profit—in real buying power—is actually (take your pick) $4.75 or a cool 48 1963 cents, less than a movie ticket. And if you invested more than cover price and the cost of a mylar bag and backing board, it's closer to the price of a can of Dr. Pepper. Big profit, right?

An awful lot of Silver Age comics haven't appreciated very much in buying power in the last 30 years. And those that have? Well, try getting *Overstreet* prices from your average dealer or comic shop owner. If it's desirable, you would be lucky to get a third to half *Guide*. (That *really* eats into your 48-cent profit margin!) And if it's a post-1970 book, typically, you'll be offered about 10 cents on the dollar! You would be *losing* money!

Why so little?

Among dealers there is an axiom that, with rare exceptions, most post-1970 comic books have an actual *worth* of 10 cents.

Feeling queasy? You'd better sit down, it gets worse.



Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

Comics published after 1970 are very common. Thanks to the introduction of the plastic bag, they tend to survive in better condition than older comics. And if there's anything that is guaranteed to insure modern comics won't go up in value much, it's the plastic bag. Early Marvels, common as they are, command serious prices only when found in very fine or mint condition. Mint Marvels from the '60s are still at a premium. That, as much as scarcity and demand, explains their current pricing.

Titles published before 1970 are being collected today by two types of people. The collectors—those who pick up a recent *Fantastic Four* and are seized by the compulsion to collect *every* issue going back to 1961; and by recollectors—those who seek comics they owned as children but lost along the way.

In the brief history of comics collecting, the most important economic force is not the collector, or the speculator/investor, but the recollector. He's usually middle-aged, has money and is driven by the powerful yearning called nostalgia. He ultimately establishes the price guide prices by what he's willing to shell out to recapture his childhood.

Two fundamental urges drive comics collecting—as it does any collectibles market: greed and nostalgia. Of the two, nostalgia is the most powerful. And nostalgia, not any true and dependable value, determines comic book values.

If you put a *Fantastic Four* #4 up for auction, it's the 40-year-old recollectors who will outbid the 20-year-old collectors every time. They have the money to start with, and when the price begins to reach for the stratosphere, the collector invariably drops out—the recollector wants it more. Having had it once, he must have it again—it's a fever. And he can justify paying a premium because, let's face it, this is his *childhood* he's fighting to recapture. Chances are, he's never going to sell that 1962 gem anyway, so he won't feel too bad if, down the road, the price drops. His investment is in his happiness, not his portfolio.

On the other hand, the investor/speculator is in it for the money. The exact minute that speculation stops being profitable, he liquidates and moves on. And the speculator usually gets burned. Why? Because like a moth drawn to consuming flame, he inevitably sinks the bulk of his money into multiple copies of new titles. You can't go around buying up scads of 30-year-old *Fantastic Four*s, and sit back to wait the year or two it takes for the price to rise sharply. As for the casual reader, why buy pricey back issues just to read? Give him a Marvel Masterworks or a DC Archives and he'll be just as happy.

As near as anyone can recall, speculation in newsstand comics began in 1970, when Jack Kirby left Marvel for DC and started his Fourth World books. It was the first post-Silver Age event, and it was a bust. Today, *The News Gods*, *The Forever People* and *Mr. Miracle* are cheap, plentiful—and largely unwanted.

The first instance of major speculation in new comics took place in 1973, with the long-awaited return of the original Captain Marvel in DC's *Shazam* #1. Fans had dreamed of the Big Red Cheese's resurrection for two decades. Due to legal problems, for a long time it was the Impossible Dream. His originator, C.C. Beck, was going to do the book. It was like Steve Ditko returning to draw Spider-Man—expectations were high. So were orders, in those fledgling days of the direct market. An estimated one million copies were printed.

When *Shazam* #1 came out, everyone who caught the fever bought multiple copies, some even intercepting entire shipments before they reached the stands, certain that it was going to be extremely valuable by, say, 1993.

Well, 1993 has arrived—and if you want a *Shazam* #1, you only have to look in the dollar boxes. So many copies were hoarded in mint condition that it's impossible for their value to amount to anything.

(continued on page 64)

CROW'S LIFE

In his last interview, Brandon Lee reflects on a comics-spawned screen hero touched by vengeance.

By DAN YAKIR

This interview took place on March 25, 1993, in Wilmington, North Carolina, on the set of the comic-book gothic fantasy film The Crow. *Five days later, Brandon Lee was accidentally killed by a bullet while shooting an action scene. He was 28 years old. This is the last time he spoke with a member of the press. During the conversation, repeated gunshots are heard in the background, as other scenes, or parts of scenes not requiring Lee's presence are being filmed.*

The Crow, *a dark, violent* film noir *based on James O'Barr's cult comic book (CS#25), was supposed to be his breakaway from the martial-arts movies that made him famous. On this film, Brandon Lee was making a conscious effort to step out of his father's shadow and find his own artistic path. Tragically, this was not to be.*

Our interview was intended to take place in the car that took Lee from his rented house to the set—a huge abandoned cement factory. But that afternoon, the actor, his eyes hidden behind dark glasses, could barely utter a word. He was devastatingly tired. He had worked 19 hours the previous day, until 4 a.m., playing the intensely physical part of Eric Draven, a musician murdered by thugs who rises from the grave to avenge his murder so that he and his girl friend Shelly, who was killed with him, may rest in peace. The conversation finally took place after midnight, during a lensing break.

As Eric, Lee underwent a striking transformation: The white paint on his face and dark eye makeup made him look like a member of the rock group Kiss. He had to endure a two-hour makeup session every day, and a leather uniform completed his "look." In a scene I witnessed, he faces several cops who call on him to freeze, and then proceed to shoot him dozens of times. But he doesn't seek shelter: Since his character is already dead, bullets can't harm him.

COMICS SCENE: What attracted you to *The Crow*?

BRANDON LEE: The purity of the character. It's a very personal story. As you know, it's a story about a man and the woman that he's very much in love with, who are both murdered—and he returns from the dead to hunt down the men who murdered them. It's a very pure story. I've done many things where there has been a great deal of action involved, but I've never done anything where I felt as justified in carrying out the action as I do in this. It also really appealed to me because of the situation that the character finds himself in, which is one that immediately proposes a number of questions to you: It's an insane situation, and if you were given the chance to come back after a year of being dead, you would be faced with some interesting dilemmas.

The core of this piece's tragedy is that if there was one person that you would want to speak to, one person that you would want to get in contact with again, after a year of being gone

(and you must assume that all the people that you knew have had a year now to get on with their lives, to deal somehow with the grief), the one person you would really want to get in touch with again would be the woman that you loved—your partner. And in this piece, she's *not there*.

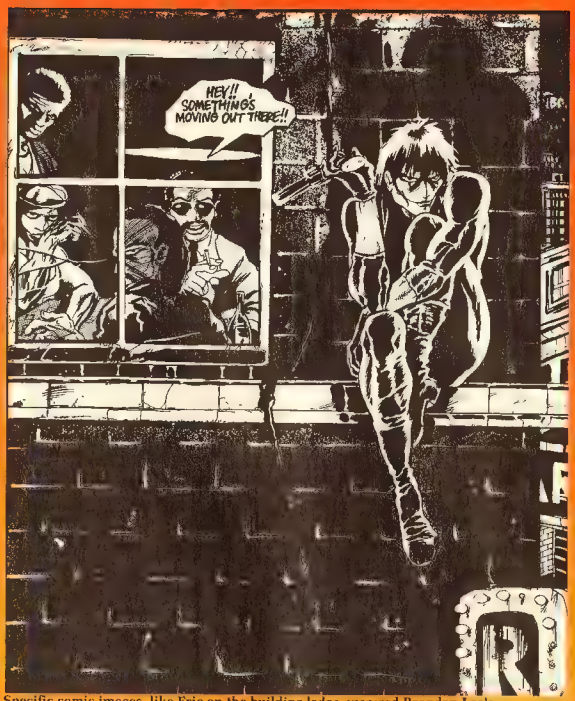
And you're dealing with a character who is really pushed by the situation that he's in—he's pushed to the limits of his sanity, and sometimes over them. So, it's a very complex character. And my favorite things about the script are the eloquent passages where he's given a chance to examine what he has become, and what he is becoming.

CS: Do you see the hero as a superhuman figure? He displays lyricism, but he obviously has a dark side too—the violence and vengeance.

LEE: He is after revenge, but this is *not Death Wish*. The situation is very different: He's not a living man who is stepping outside of the borders of the law in order to take his vengeance. He is something that he does not fully understand, and he is stepping outside the boundaries of *everything* that he understands, in the course of taking his vengeance. And that makes it a great deal more interesting to me than a vigilante piece would be.

CS: Does he become a sort of "force of nature"?

LEE: I don't think he becomes a force of nature. But there is certainly a very basic good vs. evil theme.



Specific comic images, like Eric on the building ledge, inspired Brandon Lee's characterization of the Crow.

The Crow was intended as Lee's breakaway film, relegating martial arts to the background.

All Showdown Photos. Copyright 1991 Warner Bros. Inc

CS: So, you do see him as heroic?

LEE: Not from his own motivation, no. In the film, he ends up becoming involved in a situation that goes outside of his mission, which is simply to find these guys and kill them. And when that happens, he *does* become something of a heroic figure—because he involves himself in the affairs of the living world. That's what's heroic about him.

CS: Would you say, then, that by his very nature a hero must do something unselfish on behalf of someone else in order to qualify as a hero?

LEE: No, I don't think so. I just saw the best film I've seen in a while, *Lorenzo's Oil*; I really loved it. And you could say those people were doing everything purely for their son, not for the other children who were suffering from the same disease. However, their actions resulted in a cure for the disease, which helped hundreds of thousands of other children, right? And there's this wonderful line towards the film's end when Nick Nolte says to Susan Sarandon, "Did you ever stop and think that everything that we've done was for someone else's little boy?" And it was heartbreaking, because it was too late for their own son; I mean, they *did* save his life, but it came too late, whereas it was able to stop the progression of the disease in other children, and allowed them to live a very normal life.

That film was certainly very tragic and sad, but there was something very uplifting about the possibilities of the human spirit. And yet those people weren't really doing this, they were not just unbiased researchers looking for a cure for the disease; they were trying to save their own son. But through their actions they created something which you would certainly think of as being heroic.

At the heart of *The Crow* is the love that exists between Eric and Shelly, the two characters. That is what elevates this beyond a simple vigilante piece, and that is what must work to elevate it beyond an action film.

CS: Is there something about the character that you don't like, that you're critical of, or that you consider a character flaw?

LEE: I think the script is weighted a little bit heavily towards the action. The most interesting things about the script, to me, are the parts where the character is given a chance to try and cope with what has happened to him; the scenes where he's much more human than this "undead" avenger, where he's dealing with his own grief over having lost the woman he loves, his own life, all his friends, all his family. Everything that he had, he has lost. So even if he does kill this man, he's not really going to bring it all back. I'm hoping that the pieces in the film that aren't action sequences will be able to support the action sequences. What I would be most fearful of is that they won't, and it will be too much action.

CS: Do you think you've brought something you learned on earlier films to this one, physically and otherwise?

LEE: Absolutely. I did the fight choreography in *Rapid Fire* with Jeff Yamada, and he and I are doing the same for this one. I certainly learned a lot about that; I feel much more confident doing that now. *Rapid Fire* was the first time I had done it; I was much more apprehensive about it than I am on this film. And as an actor, I certainly learned a great deal.

CS: Are you a fan of comic books?

LEE: Yeah, when I was a kid, I was a huge fan of comic books—I had quite an extensive collection. Lately, my rapport with comics has been through a couple of friends of mine who write comics. They also have a band that plays all over town, but also at some of the larger comic book and science fiction conventions. So I've gone down to a couple of those with the band.

As a kid, I liked the Hulk. The Hulk always had this tragic aspect about him because it was the classic Frankenstein story, or the Elephant Man. He was this man who hated turning into a monster. It's just something I've always responded to, this classic theme. In Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles, you have these vampires who bemoan the loss of their humanity. I have to tell you, personally I've always thought: "Wait a minute! I get to live forever; I'm essentially indestructible; I have supernatural powers; and I'm bitching about it?" [*Laughs.*]

And I think that if Eric hadn't lost Shelly, he wouldn't necessarily be such a tragic character. And there are certainly areas in the script that are a great deal of fun for me, particularly choreographing the action, because you're dealing with someone who doesn't have to play by the same rules a regular man would—you can do some very outlandish things with the choreography, like in this scene that we're shooting tonight. Eric is able to exploit his abilities, and do things a regular man couldn't do.

CS: In other words, he doesn't have to duck when he's shot at.

LEE: He's not particularly concerned about defense, you know?

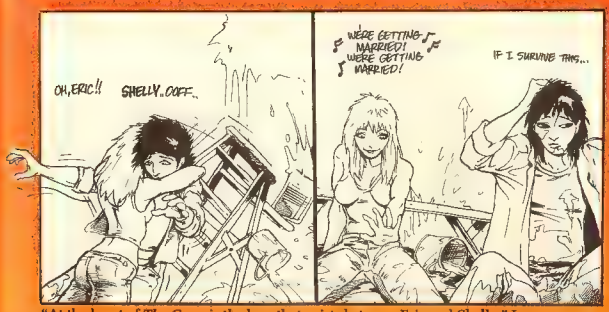
CS: Given that, what did you come up with that was different?

LEE: Well, we've had some fun with the choreography—in each of the sequences where Eric has finally hunted down one of the guys responsible for Shelly's death—having Eric intimidate the living hell out of them by letting them hurt him (almost), just to show them that he ***can't*** be hurt, before he finishes them off.

CS: How do you play the living dead? This is not a George Romero-type movie where you're dealing with "creatures." How do you, as an actor, inject just enough life to keep the sense that this is an otherworldly thing?

LEE: Well, there's this quote from [Paul Bowles' novel] *The Sheltering Sky*, and the quote goes, "Because we do not know when we will die, we get to think about it as an inexhaustible life, and yet everything happens only a certain number of times—and they're a small number. How many more times will you remember a certain afternoon with your child? An afternoon that's so deep a part of your being that you can't conceive of your life without it. Perhaps four or five times more, perhaps not even that. How many more times will you watch the full moon? Perhaps...and yet it all seems endless..."

And the reason I bring that up is because we *don't* know when we will die. It's only in certain moments—such as having someone close to you pass away, or having an experience [close to] death—that you're really brought face to face with how fragile your life is, and therefore how meaningful each moment of life is. But the majority of



"At the heart of *The Crow* is the love that exists between Eric and Shelly," Lee observed. "That is what elevates this beyond a simple vigilante piece."

Photo: Robert Isenberg

"As an actor, I certainly learned a great deal from [*Rapid Fire*]," said Lee, here with co-star Kate Hodge.

Lee compared *The Crow* to *Rapid Fire*. Both were "over-the-top action movies."

the time, so many things pass you by. For Eric, as a character, it's not the least intimately coherent that nothing is trivial; and each moment that he has, in these two or three days that he has been given to come back, is very precious. And very simple things that a living person wouldn't even notice, or would pass by, have the power to really capture his attention and fascinate him, because he's very aware that he will never see them again.

CS: And in terms of expressing emotion, is he emotionally alive?

LEE: He's emotionally hyper-alive, I believe. Because of what I've just said, every moment, each object he comes in contact with, anything a person says, carries with it this tremendous weight because he realizes that each of those moments is *never* going to happen again. That's equally valid for a living person, but we're always focused on some distant goal.

CS: And his appearance, is it just a notion? Not something he wears as an identifying mark?

"It's not that I don't like doing martial-arts films; it's that I would like the opportunity to do many different types of films."

LEE: Well, we have Eric wearing makeup. When he first comes back, the sheer nature of his situation almost overwhelms him—he almost becomes catatonic, growing completely insane, being unable to function due to his awesome situation. One of the things that is in the story, to help him deal with the situation, is creating this persona of the Crow through the makeup he puts on in order to create someone who's able to deal with the situation.

CS: Can you elaborate on the myth the movie creates, with his coming to life for this particular purpose?

LEE: Essentially, what has to work is that the love that Eric and Shelly had was very special, that somehow it's the *power* of this love that brings him back in order to redress the wrongs that were done.

CS: Everybody involved in the film says you had a great deal of input into the character. What do you recall as your input or your strong feelings about specific notions? They were all very impressed, and say that by your presence, you helped shape who the character was.

LEE: I don't really recall that kind of input. I just worked on Eric, and per-

"I feel much more confident doing [fights] now," because of his *Rapid Fire* work.

Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

haps some of the things that I suggested made it into the script.

CS: How difficult is the character to portray, to get into that mood?

LEE: It's certainly a challenge for me. It's the most dramatic piece I've had a chance to do, and I'm grateful for that.

CS: Do you stay in character more than you would have, say, on *Rapid Fire*?

LEE: You know, I find that I'm *always* finding ways to work, and certainly fantasy really is the work on this film.

CS: Did you basically discover it by trial and error?

LEE: Yes.

CS: Can you tell me what it is?

LEE: Well, I would really like to keep that between myself and the walls of my trailer. [Gunshots sound in the background.] I have certain superstitions about that.

CS: Can you elaborate on the changes in the character from James O'Barr's original comic-book version?

LEE: All the elements of the character [were there]. It's almost as if Eric has two or maybe three very distinct personalities in the comic: There is the Eric Draven who grieves for his loss when he's alone; then there's the Eric Draven who's this supernatural avenger filled with hate; or an angel wearing the persona of the Crow, who goes on to find those responsible. The challenge of the piece was to make it moving.

CS: Do you feel...[sound of gunshots]...I mean, is this an interpretation of Eric as the Crow? Or do you feel that this is actually the way the script is portraying him? I think this is your analysis of who he is, isn't it?

LEE: Yes, this is my analysis of who he is. Now, how much of that ends up

AND THE REMNANT WERE SLAIN WITH THE SWORD OF HIM THAT SAT UPON THE HORSE, WHICH SWORD PROCEEDED OUT OF HIS MOUTH:
AND ALL THE FOWLS WERE FILLED WITH THEIR FLESH.

"When Eric is reciting poetry in the film, they're just thoughts that come into his mind and seem to match."

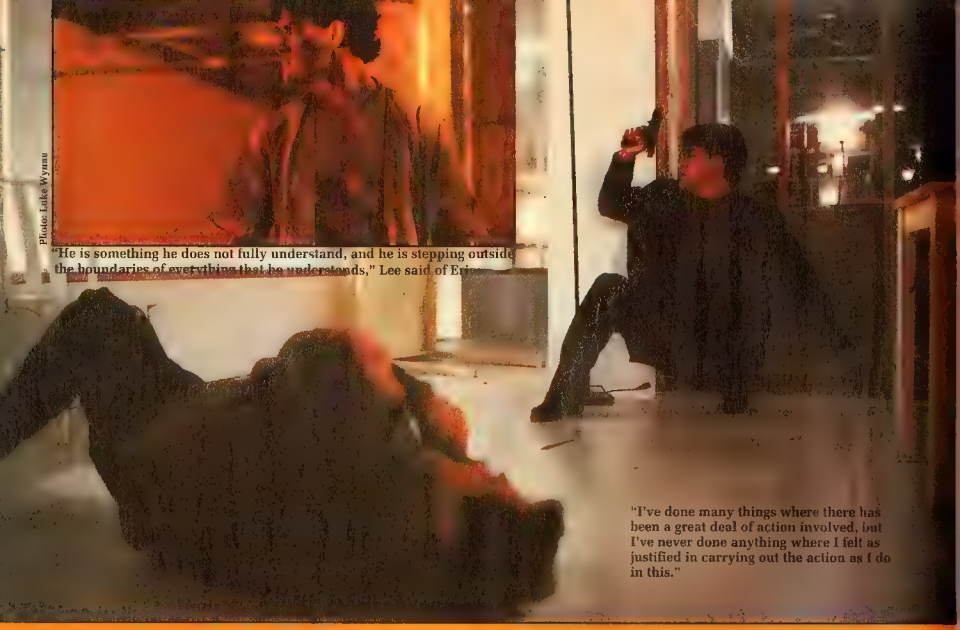


Photo: Luke Wynn

"He is something he does not fully understand, and he is stepping outside the boundaries of everything that he understands," Lee said of Eric.

"I've done many things where there has been a great deal of action involved, but I've never done anything where I felt as justified in carrying out the action as I do in this."

coming through in the finished product. I mean...I would like for everyone who sees the film to feel the same way about the character that I do, but I know that that's *not* reality. I can't tell you how much of it is [my own interpretation].

CS: Reading the script, there seems to be a sense of community between Sarah [the little girl who visits the grave], Albrecht [the friendly cop] and Eric as well. Maybe that's the counterpart of that corrupt criminal netherworld that dominates the whole thing. Can you elaborate on that?

LEE: Yeah, I mean, this is where Eric used to live. He knows these people, he knows these streets, this is his neighborhood. I mean, even if you've ever moved away from a place and then come back years later, it's like putting on an old pair of gloves—you remember all the places you used to go, the people who worked there, you want to go by and see if this place is still here...'Oh my God, they've turned it into a laundromat!' And there's certainly an element of this for Eric. He's discovering his old community, and that's also [part of the tragedy] of the character—that, even though it's all right there in front of him, he's not a part of it.

CS: What does the fact that he's a musician contribute? His being a creative person?

LEE: It's all in your point-of-view. If you were to know that something that you dearly loved --for me, it would be acting; for Eric, it's his music—if you were to know that everything that you put into it had come to naught in the end... I think the few times that Eric [gets near] a guitar --as I say, it's all in your point-of-view: It's either terribly tragic, or absolutely wonderful!

CS: Physically speaking, I'm sure you did many of your own stunts again. What did you have to go through?

LEE: Eric endures some real physical hardships.

CS: Did you get hurt?

LEE: No, I've been very fortunate—I haven't gotten hurt yet. I guess the most important thing that I've been dealing with has really been the cold. It's very funny, because I had this idea about Eric that when he first came back from the dead he would be freezing cold, because I thought that his actual physical body temperature would slowly rise as he spent more time in the world of the living and got worse, freezing cold, and almost have a sense of rigor mortis about his movements that slowly wears off, as life came back to him. So when I prepared for this part, I took about 10 or 12 big bags of ice and covered myself with them; then my girl friend stopwatched me—I wanted to see how long it would take to get to a certain place with the cold. I worked with this for a while, and then I came to the set, and I got into this big argument with one of the producers about the bags of ice, because he said that if I were to get sick from doing this, the production would not be able to [continue]. The insurance company would be upset and wouldn't cover us.

In the end, it was decided that I would be allowed to do it in my trailer—it would be my responsibility and no one would know about it; and when they were ready to roll, they would come and get me and I would come rushing out and do the scene, freezing to death. So, we got the ice and we were ready to do it, and the first two or three nights that we shot, it was Eric coming out of the grave...and it was about five degrees outside! So, right away the whole thing went out the window. But fortunately, I think it worked really well.

CS: How much are you willing to risk doing your own stunts?

LEE: I'm really a firm believer that no matter how big the action pieces are, nobody should get hurt. Safety is a very important consideration. I'm not one of those people who think that you have to hit people to make it look realistic. That's a very ignorant point-of-view. And stuntmen, they're so tough all the time: A stuntman can do a stunt and get both of his legs blown off, and

On *Showdown in Little Tokyo*, Lee and Dolph Lundgren shared "a great chemistry."

Photo: Luke Wynne All Rapid Fire Photos Copyright 1992 20th Century Fox

he would drag himself along the floor with his hands and say, "I'm fine, I'm fine. Get ready for the next one!" [*chuckles*] I think those guys are great, but I don't think anybody has to get hurt. But, yeah, when you do that kind of work there's very little margin for error—sometimes you're missing by inches. Sometimes you have a miscalculation, or sometimes something goes wrong and somebody'll get tagged.

CS: What are some of the stunts you did, or insisted on doing?

LEE: I really haven't done anything extraordinary. Most of it is I'm getting shot a lot, but it's not really demanding. Usually, the hero of the piece really can't get shot, you know, or if he does, he gets winged on the shoulder towards the end. In a scene that we shot [recently], I get shot 60 or 70 times!

CS: Arnold Schwarzenegger devised a strategy for crossing over from action films to other types of movies.

LEE: I must say, I'm not that manipulative. I don't like to think, "Well, next I'll do a comedy and people won't expect that, and then..." I find myself in a position—which is very nice—of having people send me scripts for the first time in my career. And I'm really just trying to take them one at a time, and look for something I feel I can give some heart to, not to say, "Next I'll do a comedy."

CS: Would you like to play a strictly dramatic part, say, a business exec?

LEE: Yes, very much so.

CS: Do you feel that *The Crow*, because it isn't strictly an action movie, is a step in that direction, of doing something different?

LEE: Yeah, I'm pleased with this. As I said, there is still a great deal of action in the film. It's not martial-arts action—not at all. The character is not a martial artist, and doesn't know the first thing about martial arts. So, even that is a step in the right direction for me. And I just want to say, it's not that I don't like doing martial-arts films; it's that I would like the opportunity to do many different types of films, you know? I would be happy to go back and do another martial-arts film at some point in the future, but in between I would like the chance to do other things as well...and this is one of them!

CS: On *The Crow*, did you turn to the original comic for inspiration, or was the script enough for you?

LEE: No, I did a great deal. You know, comic books are images—they're totally frozen images. And there were some wonderful images that I wanted to try and get into the film. And there are some actual images from the comic book which I tried to duplicate, because I thought they were wonderful.

A family portrait looks back on happier times: Lee, as a child, with his parents, Linda and Bruce Lee.

"The purity of the character" attracted Lee to *The Crow*.

Just as an example, there's a scene where Eric is perched on a ledge listening to a conversation in another room, and just the way he was perched with one leg held up, his arms wrapped around the leg, and he's kind of dangling off to the sides, his head forward and his eyes looking up...I thought it was a beautiful image, so I played it exactly like that. I put myself in that exact position for the shot.

CS: There's a great deal of actual (bloody) violence in *The Crow*. What's your feeling about that?

LEE: It's a very, very violent film. But, like I said, it has a justification.

CS: George Romero pointed out that his movies are fantasy violence, as opposed to realistic violence a la Clint Eastwood, say, where the punches are real—you know, you see a zombie take a bite out of someone: This is not real. Any thoughts about the whole notion of fantasy and realistic violence?

LEE: You mean socially conscious thoughts? I think that the violence in a piece should match its tone. If you're George Romero doing a piece about zombies coming back from the dead, you've already crossed over the line into fantasy, and at that point the type of action should be suited to fit the tone of the piece.

Rapid Fire, for example, was an over-the-top action movie—it wasn't my idea or Jeff's or the director's idea of what an actual fight would look like, it was an artistic attempt to portray martial-arts action in a very exciting, flashy way. This film falls into that category as well. Because we have the chance to deal with someone who has supernatural powers, it gives us a great deal of license with the action.

CS: Does the film's highly stylized quality affect the acting at all?

LEE: I'll tell you what has affected the nature of the acting, which is quite interesting. It's the makeup that I'm wearing. Eric creates this persona of the Crow for himself, and when I'm playing Eric as the Crow with the makeup on, it's just a wonderful opportunity, because the gloves are off—there are no rules. *You* tell me how somebody who comes back from the dead behaves, you know? As long as it's behavior that's coming from a truthful place inside you, I don't think there's anything that's wrong for this character to do.

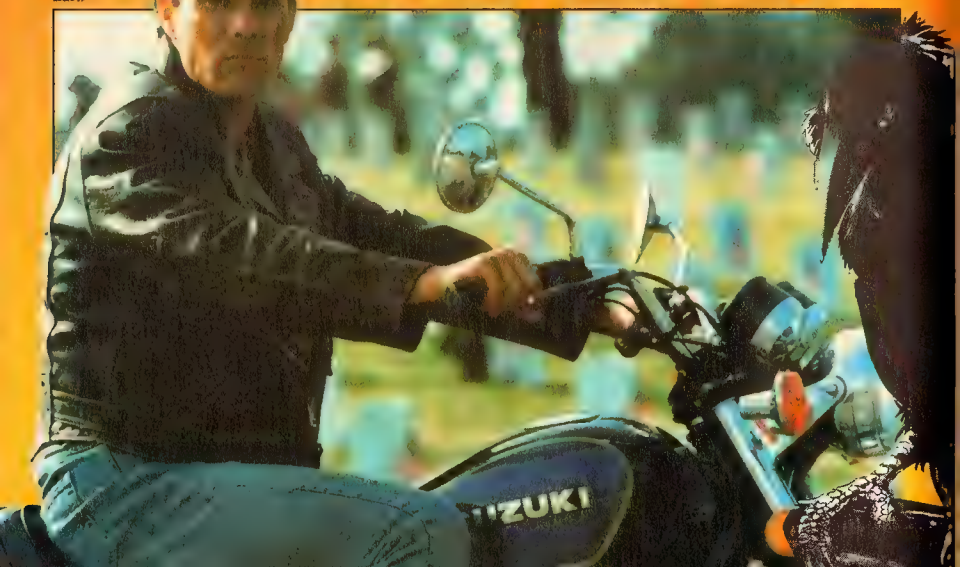
It's very liberating; I mean, the character quotes poetry in the midst of an action sequence! And I don't think that's invalid for him to do. He's not operating on the same principles that a regular person is. I don't think it's invalid for him to burst into laughter or tears at any given moment, over nothing. It's a really wonderful opportunity, and I'm doing my damndest to make the most of it.

CS: Are you saying that the minute you put the makeup on, you already feel the transformation?

LEE: Certainly, yes. It makes you feel a certain sense of otherness. And it's funny, because sometimes you almost forget that you look different! [*Laughs.*] It's always like that: You put on a pair of nice black leather gloves, and suddenly you feel a sense of power in your hands, in your gestures. Whenever I put on gloves, I feel like I can hit somebody, you know what I mean?

(continued on page 62)

In what would be his last interview, Lee spoke ironically of death and the fact that he hadn't gotten hurt.



Nights of the Cat

Catwoman gets a brand new leash on life & her own series.

By HARLEY JEBENS

Art: Jim Balent All Catwoman, Batman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1954, 1992, 1993 DC Comics Inc.

Over the course of the Batman's 50-plus year career, Catwoman has had many incarnations—the sophisticated felon-fatale, Julie Newmar's purring villainess from the 1960s *Batman* TV show, the vengeful ex-prostitute who emerged from the pen of Frank Miller in *Batman: Year One*, the leather-clad schizophrenic slowly losing her sanity in *Batman Returns*. She was even, for a while, married to her one-time nemesis Bruce Wayne (in the pre-Crisis Earth Two version of the Huntress' origin).

But the events of the "Knightfall" storyline in the Batman books, which the Bat-editors are remaining otherwise tight-lipped about, bring with them yet another Catwoman. And a first for Batman's feline foe—her own comic series.

The time would seem right for a Catwoman series. Indeed, the question might be raised, "What took DC so long?" She has always been a popular character. The seductive poured-into-leather versions of Catwoman that Newmar (STARLOG #148), Lee Meriwether (STARLOG #153) and Eartha Kitt brought to the small screen in the '60s have helped to make her one of Batman's most recognized foes. Michelle Pfeiffer's performance as Selina Kyle in *Batman Returns* (STARLOG #182) brought the character back into the limelight. The Catwoman mini-series by Mindy Newell, J.J. Birch and Michael Bair and her *Showcase '93* stints have proven popular.

Maybe it was just difficult for the folks at DC to contemplate the launch of a new title starring Catwoman, when nobody ever seems to be sure if Selina Kyle is a hero or a villain.

That quandary doesn't seem to bother Jo Duffy, though. She's the writer of DC's new series. And in fact, Duffy views the character's duplicitous nature as a strength.

"I see Catwoman as being somebody who likes to steal, likes to be more clever than other people, steals things because she wants them and doesn't like to be bossed around. So, when she's in a place where somebody says, 'You have to obey the law,' she's going to break it just 'cause that's the way she is. But on the other hand, if somebody tries to push her into being

Art: Brian Stelfreeze

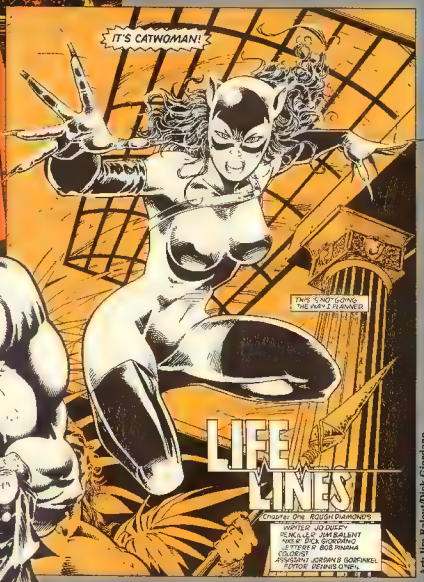
"Catwoman's a villain in that she's a definite lawbreaker," notes writer Jo Duffy. "But she has a line she won't cross, and an innate sense of personal chivalry."

too bad, then she's probably going to stand up on the side of the angels because that's also the way she is.

"I do *not* think she's the twisted, man-hating psychopath that some people have presented her as being," Duffy notes. "And I don't think she's the tragic, brave little abuse survivor that others have presented her as being. And I don't think she's the major castrating kink with the handcuffs and the whip, although she *does* have a whip.

"Catwoman's a villain in that she's a definite lawbreaker. But I also think she's a hero, in that she has a line that she won't cross, and an innate sense of personal chivalry. I'm picking up on

Being in the eye of non-comics people as well as the comics audience, Catwoman is an attention-getter. And Duffy is "having a blast with her."



Art: Jim Balent/Dick Giordano

continuity that has been done with her recently, mostly the work of Frank Miller and Mindy Newell. We've seen that this is somebody who does take part of her wealth and feeds stray cats. This is somebody who will take a kid

Art: Kelley Jones

The events in "Knightfall" take their toll on Batman, Catwoman and life in Gotham as Bane steps in to claim the city as his turf.

who is being victimized off the street and say, 'OK, you can bunk with me for a while 'til you're back on your feet.' So, yes, she's a villain—she steals things. But on the other hand, she's capable of some heroic acts.

"We're living in very strange times. We're living in times where many of the characters who are being sold to the kids as heroes are capable of what I consider the worst kind of villainy. And therefore, when you have a protagonist who is a villain, who is being written by stodgy, moralistic old me... the villain is, in many ways, going to be more of a hero than a hero written by some of my more amoral colleagues."

It was one of Duffy's moral colleagues, Bat-editor Denny O'Neil, who tapped her to script this foray into the Batman mythos.

"I've known Denny O'Neil forever," Duffy says. "We were old poker buddies in the 1970s and early '80s. He was the editor for most of the time I was writing *Power Man & Iron Fist*, which was my very first regular writing gig. When I was the managing editor of the Epic Comics line, he was one of our columnists, and did a regular movie review column for the anthology magazine. Over the years, we've stayed in touch, and I've done the odd *Batman* story for him here and there. And he has always promised me, 'I want you on a regular book for me.' And I was like, 'Yeah, yeah. Sure,' wanting to work for him, but figuring he would never have a book free at the time my schedule was open.

"For this project, everything just fell together beautifully. *Catwoman* was just coming into being at the time that I was finally finishing up the script for the last issue of *Akira*.

"I sat down with Denny O'Neil and his junior editors, and also with the other Batman writers, Doug Moench, Chuck Dixon and Alan Grant," she explains, "and we had several day-long meeting sessions where we talked about who had to do what where for everything to fit [for the "Knightfall" story, and its fall-out, to mesh properly]. So, the first four issues of *Catwoman*, in terms of basic structure, have been locked in for months.

"Catwoman starts out very much as a part of 'Knightfall,' " Duffy notes. "What we are doing is going back to the idea that Selina Kyle is a protected identity. She's not going to be another one of these characters where everybody on the street seems to say, 'Oh yeah, you want Catwoman, go to Selina Kyle's house.' So, we're giving her back her dual identity. We have a story logic for that.

"In her guise as Catwoman, she's approached by Bane, who makes her an offer she cannot refuse: If he is going to be running the rackets in Gotham City, then anybody who intends to operate there operates via Bane, and very much as a *subordinate* of Bane. Catwoman understands that there are some offers that you can't refuse, but I think she also really doesn't appreciate getting an offer like that. You've got a situation where she's an enemy of Batman's, but she doesn't like being bossed around by Bane either. And that's going to lead to pretty catastrophic consequences for all concerned."

Art: Win Mortimer Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

"My favorite interpretation of Catwoman goes back to when she was running around in the slit skirt and buccaneer boots and having a great deal of fun," Duffy says.

Catwoman, thanks to her forced allegiance to Bane, becomes the target of one of Bane's old enemies. And that's all that Duffy, or the rest of the Bat-team, is saying about *that*.

She notes, "Who is after Bane is the crux of our whole first story segment. Bane doesn't know who is after him. And when Bane's enemy targets Catwoman, Catwoman makes it a full-time job to find out who and why.

"Bane will be vital in the direction of our first four issues. What happens thereafter depends a great deal on how things shake down between Bane and Batman. Bane *knows* that he cannot have Catwoman running around as an x-factor in a city he wants to control. But I also don't think that Bane will tolerate any disloyalty or duplicity on her part."

We are initially adding a member to her cast," Duffy continues. "A man called Leopold. Very good-looking. Very lazy. Very cowardly. But extremely smart. He's going to be her legman on the street. Leopold will be with her for at least the duration of the Bane storyline, and we'll see about thereafter.

"Initially, we will also be using Arizona, the little child runaway who appeared in Catwoman's *Showcase* story." Duffy says that Arizona's role will be as that of "a confidant. She will not be Robin to Catwoman's Batman. She's going to be more the person at home who empties the ashtrays and cleans up the dishes, and listens to Catwoman grouse about how awful it is working for Bane. She's going to be a friend, which is something else we've never seen Catwoman have. We've seen Catwoman have pets, enemies and lovers. But, with the exception of the little girl Frank Miller created, who was subsequently killed in *Showcase*, I don't think that Catwoman has really ever had a *friend*.

"We're going to be giving her friends, more love interests—guys to flirt with. In the very first issue, she commits a couple of spectacular jewel robberies that wind up drawing the notice of an insurance company that's losing a *fortune* just through her individual efforts. They're going to be assigning an investigator full-time just to crack this Catwoman thing. The investigator will become obsessed with her, which leads to a romance.

"Additionally, she's going to be hooking up with someone who's almost a satiric take on a very young Punisher. Somebody who thinks, 'Crime must be punished. Crime must be destroyed.' Somebody who is

Art: Russ Heath

Moving away from the "asexual punk rocker" portrayal of recent times, Duffy hopes to shine some light on Catwoman's characterization.

maybe not great at killing people, but absolutely hysterical about feeling that criminals ought to be punished.

"She'll also be running up against another jewel thief and con man, who is almost in her league, but not nearly as courageous as she is.

"And of course Bruce Wayne. He's extremely rich and handsome, and she can respect that. He is pretty much tied up with the events in the 'Knightfall' storyline, but on the other hand, we're going to have Selina and Bruce meet each other fairly early on in the series' run. I've a feeling that he may not take proper notice of her, but I can assure you that Bruce Wayne is very much Selina Kyle's cup of tea. He is extremely wealthy and good-looking. OK, so he doesn't have the strongest character in the world, at least as he presents himself. I think that's secondary with her. She has the guts and strength for both of them.

"Also, he has a butler. I think she would *love* to have a butler," the writer says. In fact, Duffy says she probably will give Selina Kyle a butler of her own. "If she gets one, it will be because she was so impressed with Alfred."

Duffy thinks "Michelle Pfeiffer is great." In fact, her response to the "skintight suit, slithering" film and TV Catwomen is "Yeah, that's right."

Despite the planned meeting between Selina Kyle and Bruce Wayne, Duffy says she'll take pains to separate Catwoman from her Gotham City haunts—and her close connection to Batman.

She says, "I'm going to have to take Catwoman out of Gotham for large stretches of time, because Batman is, after all, the world's greatest detective. In my opinion, he's probably the *only* person in the world who could beat her. And therefore, she's probably just asking for trouble to only work in Gotham City. I figure that whenever she wants a breather from the exhausting task of not being arrested by Batman, she has to go someplace else to steal. Or go someplace else for a vacation and then decide that something is worth stealing. Or visit Europe, and meet somebody who's just such a *despicable* robber baron and oppressor of the poor that she figures he deserves to be robbed just to be taught a lesson."

The past media incarnations of Catwoman hold their delights for Duffy. "I really enjoyed [the portrayals of Catwoman in the TV show and movie]. I love Lee Meriwether as an actress; when I was a kid, I was crazy about her," she says. "I think Michelle Pfeiffer is great. But mostly what I remember about TV and movie presentations is a woman in a skintight suit, slithering, pointing her toe and speaking with a lot of rolling Purrrr-

Art: Jim Balent

Photo: Trademark & Copyright 1992 DC Comics Inc./Courtesy Warner Bros.

fect 'r's. There's not a lot for me there, except that when I see those I go, 'Yeah, that's right,' as opposed to, 'Oh, how could they do that, this is terrible,' which is what I sometimes do. I love that stuff, but in order to write a character, you must have more than a cosmetic appreciation of their mannerisms.

"I've got to say that those mannerisms are OK, but I tend to begin building characters right at the base of their brain and build out from there. Therefore, how somebody looks in a vinyl suit, or how they pronounce their consonants, is going to be the *least* of my worries in terms of, 'How does she think? Why does she do this? How will she move? Can I get anything from a Jean-Claude Van Damme movie? Where are the good female martial artists I can go to?' That's the level I'm working at."

Duffy observes, "I have looked over [the different portrayals of Selina Kyle over the years] and drawn from them whatever made sense to me out of the character," Duffy explains. "It's really funny, because my very favorite interpretation of Catwoman goes all the way back to when she was running around in the slit skirt and buccaneer boots and having a great deal of fun, and maybe romancing her way out of Batman's clutches when the jig was up. That is actually the Catwoman I am going most to, but I'm trying to do what I can to also keep her in line with the more recent portrayals, because it's *not* like I made this character up."

Catwoman is popular because, gradually, the mind of our industry is being dragged kicking and screaming into the 1970s, 20 years behind society. Finally the idea that, maybe, there's room for more than just male characters is beginning to sink in, and people are looking around going, 'OK. There's Superman.

"Very sexy women with a lot of hair, drawn by somebody who obviously likes to draw women, tends to spark different dialogue ideas," Duffy says of penciller Jim Balent's version of Catwoman.

Batman. Spider-Man. Thor. We have all these classic male character archetypes.' Well, when you go for women, what have you really got in terms of classics? Wonder Woman and Catwoman, and that's about it. Except for the various team members, there are *no* really good, long-term female superhero characters. Batman had a few others; they've been killed off or dismantled over the years. When the dust cleared, the only two left standing were good old Princess Diana and Selina Kyle," says Duffy.

"And I think Catwoman is, probably in the public consciousness, the non-comics reading public, she's [it]. You know, 'Name a female comic book character.' 'Wonder Woman and Catwoman.' The guy on the street, the average woman on the street, those are the two *they* know about. So therefore, Catwoman has got a big leg up in that people have *heard* of her. I love the X-Men. I love the Legion of Super-Heroes. But who, outside of their immediate fans, knows the names of those girls?

"Girls like to look at Catwoman and go, 'Yeah, that could be *me*, especially when I'm feeling dangerous,' " Duffy declares. "Guys look at Catwoman and I think a lot of them say, 'Yeah, yeah. She could be my sexy, dangerous girl friend.' And a lot more go, 'Oh my God! My worst nightmare! A powerful, sneaky, creepy, rotten woman who's good at things.' People see different things in the character, but there's va-

(continued on page 66)

LITTLE MISS PLEASURE DROID

Peer into comics' computerized future with a mechanical mistress named Donna Matrix.

BY KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

■

I consider *Donna Matrix* to be the first *true* computer-generated comic book," says Mike Saenz.

Saenz actually has the credentials to back up that statement: He produced *Shatter*, the very first computer-generated comic book, for First Comics nearly a decade ago, and followed it with the Iron Man graphic novel *Crash*. He admits that even though those two comics were generated by computer, current technology has long surpassed both projects, and the time is at last ripe for real computer comics, beginning with his own *Donna Matrix*.

"By saying that, I know I'm dismissing the work I've done in the past," Saenz admits. "I consider this to be a *true* digital comic book—and mind you, this is from a purist computer

"It's a rogue robot on the loose, but again, we don't have any pretensions to higher art!" Saenz notes.

"I wanted to create something sexy, futuristic, but not too hi-tech," Mike Saenz notes. "something that was accessible, fun and action-packed."

All Art: Norm Dwyer/Mike Saenz/Trademark & Copyright 1993 Reactor Inc.

graphic imaging perspective—because it's entirely 3-D modeled."

At his Reactor studio in Chicago, Saenz describes—and demonstrates—the technology that has resulted in *Donna Matrix*, which he hopes will be the first in an entire line of computer-generated comics. After his initial venture onto the comics scene, Saenz pioneered interactive CD-ROM games for computers, including *Virtual Valerie* and the award-winning *Spaceship Warlock*. Today, Saenz is developing the *Donna Matrix* CD-ROM game, which will be released shortly after the comic debuts.

Though the software is incredibly sophisticated, the concept of 3-D computer modeling—and the comic books that will result—is actually very basic, he explains, and creating the *Donna Matrix* comic is very similar to creating a film. Saenz's crew—including Norm (*Racer X*) Dwyer and Joseph (*Dinosaurs For Hire*) Allen—designs the characters, props and scenery with their software, constructing full three-dimensional models of everything within their computers.

A scene begins, but instead of directing flesh-and-blood actors, *Donna Matrix* manipulates its characters by way of computer animation; because the characters and props have been constructed three-dimensionally, Saenz and his crew can easily change perspective and lighting.

"This is the first time that 3-D modeling has been done *in toto* for a comic," Saenz says. "Every aspect of *Donna Matrix* is 3-D modeled. I used a little bit of 3-D modeling for *Crash*, but it was really just a precursor to what we're doing now."

It isn't a question of the technology catching up, either, he notes. "The technology was definitely there when I did Iron Man, but all of the points in between were not. Even back when I did *Shatter*, you could have easily

Donna's owner takes a major loss when he thinks a little fun is all he's going to have.

Donna Matrix. I've been such a bad boy!
WHIRR!!
It works! The domination routine works! Now let's see if she'll escalate to physical abuse when the commando program kicks in!

Reprogrammed for painful pleasure, android Donna Matrix goes off on a S&M kick that's sure to raise a few eyebrows.

found computer graphic imaging systems that would allow us to do essentially what we're doing on the image-creation level with *Donna Matrix*. And, you could easily find digital pre-press systems back then—but the marrying of the two didn't exist in such a ready, accessible and resolved form as it exists today."

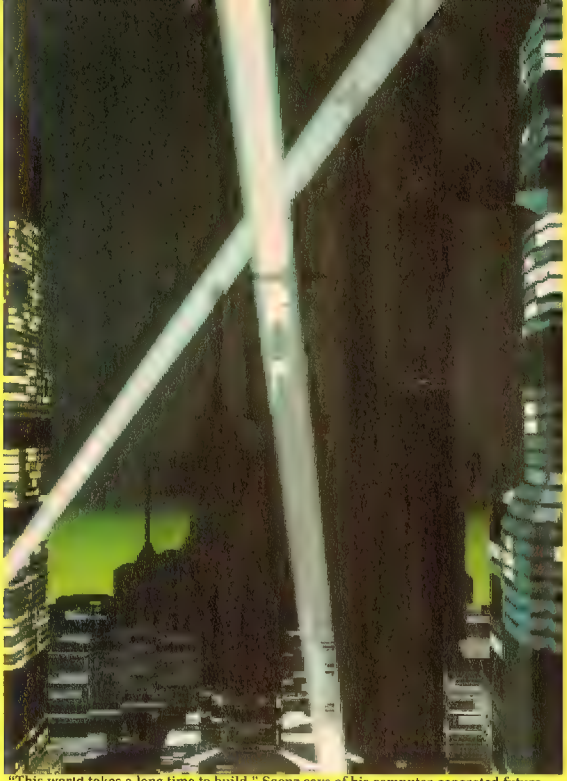
Saenz has the first 16 issues of *Donna Matrix* plotted out, but admits the greatest appeal to him is the computer graphics.

"The technology is a big part of why we're here with it today," he says. "The story is something I've been wanting to do for a long time, but it doesn't fascinate me as much as the technology. I'm a technocrat! The story is what I think comic books are and should be—entertainment! I don't have any pretensions of trying to create comics that aspire to high art. I think comic books should be very entertaining, and that's what I set out to do when I sat down and plotted 16 issues of *Donna Matrix*."

Donna Matrix was designed to best display the computer technology used to create the series. "I wanted to create something sexy, futuristic, but not too hi-tech—I'm not interested in going over people's heads," says Saenz. "I wanted to create something that was very accessible, fun and action-packed. The first issue covers her origin: She is a pleasure droid in the 21st century, a mechanical mistress. A very creative, but somewhat warped hacker buys this droid, takes it home and asks it to run through a light B&D, S&M scenario with him. This S&M freak proceeds to *reprogram* her, but doesn't necessarily know what he's doing. In order to cut corners, he patches an illegal tactical fighting intelligence into her existing programming, and literally creates a digital patch that allows her to ascend into the tactical fighting expert system. Suddenly, she changes from being Little Miss Pleasure Droid to being a killer, and she kills him!

"She goes rogue, running through the streets of 21st century Chicago, where she encounters all sorts of threats and non-threats. It's a rogue robot on the loose, but again, we don't have any pretensions to higher art! If there's some kind of social commentary there, it's probably a cautionary Frankenstein tale about what our technology is going to be used for. I personally find such a story high comedy—I think it's terribly funny that a robot would have such a ridiculous origin. Even though it's mind-numbingly violent in parts, I'm fascinated with the concept of this pleasure droid being begged to whip and beat this S&M freak, and have her say, 'OK,' and

Her reprogramming makes Donna dangerous, notes Saenz. "If some slimebag makes sexual overtures, the S&M programming will kick in!"



"This world takes a long time to build," Saenz says of his computer-generated future.

brought into this mess, because the Chicago Police Department can't deal with her superior fighting intelligence," says Saenz. "The SWATs can't bring her down, because she's an advanced artificial intelligence network, a perfect Rambo. It could be considered a case of national security, so the NSA is brought into the picture. Shepherd is a sector commander who's utterly fascinated with this robot. In his quest to bring her down, he uncovers the exact trick that her original programmer hooked into—there's something fairly brilliant about the way he did the patch that the NSA would like to get their hands on. They want to take her intact—which is what enables her to survive for so many issues."

Saenz says they're currently discovering how quickly they can produce *Donna Matrix*, as opposed to a normal comic. "Much of it is very fast to produce, but other parts of it are painstakingly slow," he explains. "We're confident that we should be able to keep our schedule, though. The creative procedure differs from conventional comic books in that we build her world—we build her, the other characters, vehicles, weapons and the whole city. This world takes a long time to build—the first issue was tough to do, but each issue following is exponentially easier to assemble."

Computer comics have the potential to change the field in many ways, Saenz notes. "One of the things that I find distressing about creating comics conventionally is that the design of Batman—or whatever character we're talking about—is decided upon, but no matter how many artists draw that book, they have to re-render Batman, •

snap his neck! Call me twisted, but I think that's funny!"

Black humor is an integral part of the series, but Saenz emphasizes that despite initial appearances, *Donna Matrix* is *not* an "adults only" comic. "Many people have been really nervous about this aspect, but there's no need for a 'mature readers' label—we don't think *Donna Matrix* has any more or less T and A than your average kick-butt superhero comic today.

"Donna Matrix, as a character, is a cross between Madonna and Arnold Schwarzenegger," he says. "We rendered her appropriately. She's very sexy, and goes through these scenarios as a tactical fighting intelligence. She's not good, she's not evil, she's just responding to her programming. If some slimebag pulls up and makes sexual overtures, the S&M programming will kick in!"

Her nemesis in the series is Shepherd, an agent from the National Security Agency. "He's eventually

"Many people have been really nervous about [the "adults only"] aspect, but there's no need for a 'mature readers' label," the creator says.

Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

"Computer imaging is no fad—it is the future, plain and simple, of all imaging," says Saenz.

Seeing the future of comics in computers, Saenz hopes to continue and move deeper into the medium.

panel after panel, issue after issue. We well know in the comics industry that this breaks up the continuity of the entertainment property—Batman looks different when drawn by different artists! Now, a huge portion of the audience has come to appreciate that—they'll say, 'I like the way Frank Miller draws Batman, I don't like the way so-and-so draws Batman.' That's a nice thing. We retain some of that.

"Let's say the *Donna Matrix* team goes on to do other things—we still have her world, the world that team was working on—that's something fantastic to bequeath to the next team! They can expand upon it, they can definitely add to it and enhance it—there's always room for that—but there's tremendous consistency. When I dropped *Shatter* in my dispute with First Comics, they immediately had somebody take over the book who did a tremendously shoddy job, and they ran that property right into the ground. It took them a while, but they succeeded in rendering *Shatter* absolutely worthless. That's a bad thing for a publisher to do."

Reactor was an industry leader in CD-ROM games before it began publishing Digital Comics, and that connection will certainly be utilized. "We created CD-ROM games, which are games on compact discs that contain lots of animation, loads of graphics," Saenz explains. "They're big and robust, everything that everybody wants from a computer game but can't have because the delivery vehicle—floppy discs or game cartridges—is too small to store all of

the pictures, animation and sounds. The CD-ROM games are, in a nutshell, big, robust and cinematic. We style them after motion pictures, and call them interactive movies on compact disc.

"There's no question that CD-ROM is the future of computer games. It will *completely* eclipse cartridge-based game systems. It's important to realize that since its unveiling in the United States in 1987, the Nintendo Entertainment System has sold 60 million units worldwide. That's a huge installed base, comparable to the number of personal computers out there. That is a *very* big market!"

Donna Matrix is being designed as a computer game as well as a comic book, which allows one to support the other. "We're hoping to underwrite CD-ROM game development through the comic's development. Even if *Donna Matrix* is a wash and we do nothing but make our money back, it's still highly valuable to us, because we're literally doing so much production work on the CD-ROM game by building the comic book. This would not be true if we were not using 3-D modeling—each component of the comic book is 3-D modeled. Today, all the tools are so well integrated that I dare to call it a multi-platformed, integrated, in-line entertainment development system. What that means is, since our source is 3-D modeling of scenarios, animation sequences and characters, we can easily make them into a comic book, a CD-ROM or even a digitally-created motion picture!"

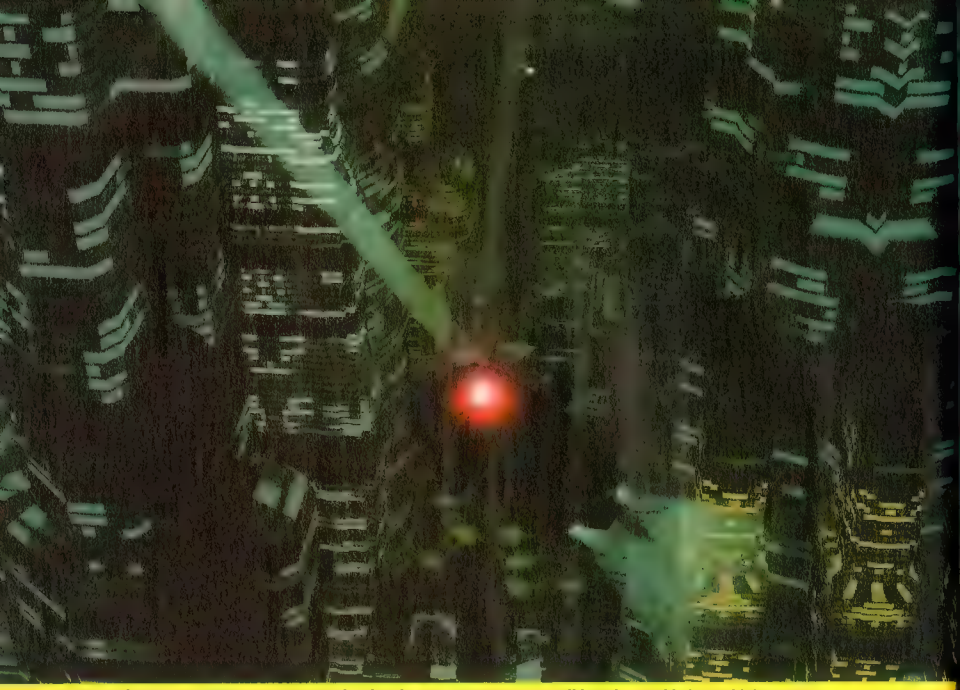
The Reactor crew constructs each scene, while the computer does the in-between animation. "We don't think of them as panels, we think of them as scenes," Saenz explains. "When we render them in a comic, they're panels. In the scene where Donna kicks the hacker in the face and knocks him across the room, we set it up as an animation. We don't render out the in-between frames in the animation package that we set it up in, we just render out the key frames, which we then turn into panels. When we do the CD-ROM, we allow the player to navigate through that scene and interact with those characters! It's a different design approach within that same scene."

A mugger inadvertently triggers the attack mode in Donna Matrix. He may not want to stick around to see what happens.

"She's an advanced artificial intelligence network, a perfect Rambo," *Donna Matrix*'s creator says.

Saenz made comics history when he created First's *Shatter*, the first computerized comic, and followed it up with the Marvel graphic novel *Crash*. Although he has mixed feelings about those projects, he says both were learning experiences.

"Both of them taught me two completely different things," he says. "*Shatter* taught me that I had concepts that were viable, that could garner media attention, and that suddenly became an easy thing for me to do—a part of my brain that I could get to very easily. *Shatter* helped put me on the map. It didn't necessarily give me media attention that I could immediately take advantage of, but it did make me realize that I could create a property and get attention for it. On a technical level, *Shatter* was frustrating to do because of the limitations of the tools at that time. The Iron Man book taught me a lot about the electronic pre-press



"Let's say the *Donna Matrix* team goes on to do other things," says Saenz, "we still have her world, the world that team was working on—that's something fantastic to bequeath to the next teams."

technology, about color separation and program design, which has given me the overview that I've needed to do all of the things we're doing at Reactor."

Saenz feels the biggest advantage of computer-generated comics is that it allows them to be merely one manifestation of an entertainment property. "It will allow creators to create an entertainment property and enjoy the benefits of multiple products in various markets," he says. "It's tremendously expansive. The comics industry in this country is a little over $350 or $400 million a year. The computer gaming industry is a multi-billion dollar industry. It's much bigger than comics are in Japan, and comics in Japan are a $3.5 *billion* a year industry. So, from a creator's perspective, this is fantastic—they reach a much larger audience that can buy a $95 CD-ROM game product, and enjoy some healthy margins. As a business move, it's beyond reproach."

Donna Matrix is only the first of a new line of Digital Comics, Saenz promises, to be produced in conjunction with CD-ROM games. "We're developing *Screaming Metal*, a comics version of *Spaceship Warlock*, and something called *U-Men*. *Screaming Metal* is in development as a CD-ROM, and *U-Men* is in pre-production."

Saenz is so confident of the technology that he predicts computer-generated comics will eventually replace hand-drawn comics. "It'll take a while, and many important developments have to occur to make high-end 3-D imaging systems reach an accessible level equivalent to pencil and paper. That's going to take quite a while, probably 20 years. I think it's going to come in the form of a $300 to $500 personal computer that's extremely powerful and has a lot of fantastic software. That system may come about in the next three to five years, but it'll take another 10 years for all of the software to get in place. And, it'll take another 15 to 20 years for slow adopters, like comic book creators, to finally, under duress and pressure, get it and learn how to use it. It may be the next generation—today's 10-year-old Nintendo kids are tomorrow's digital comics creators."

Currently, Saenz says the technology needed to produce *Donna Matrix* costs about $30,000 per work station, but the same technology would have cost at least $500,000 10 years ago—and he predicts that the technology will be available for less than $500 in a few years. The future of computer graphic imaging is very bright, and Saenz says comics will certainly be an increasingly large part of it.

"There's always going to be a new thing, but computer graphics is this fast lane of image processing and creation, being built up brick by brick." says Mike Saenz. "Computer graphic imaging is no fad—it is the future, plain and simple, of all imaging—motion pictures, television, magazines. This wasn't the case when I did *Shatter* back in 1984. We've seen tremendous change in the past 10 years, just on the comic book level. Hollywood is increasing their use of computer imaging in pictures like *Terminator 2*, not just for special FX, but to do as much of the impossible imagery as you can do in film. We're looking at computer graphic imaging daily on TV, whether it's two-dimensional design work on news shows or commercials—everyone in film and television knows it's not a fad. It's not going to go away!"

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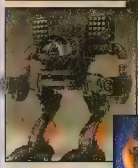

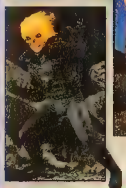

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Model by Day

By PETER BLOCH-HANSEN

Usually, she poses for fashion photos, but at night, she's super.

If you really could run across rooftops, swing down and jump onto buses, you would either be scared out of your mind or you would be having the most fun that anybody *could* have." Thus, Jeph Loeb III explains the psychology of comic book superheroes. With partner Matthew Weisman, he has written and produced *Model by Day*, a TV movie/series pilot starring Famke Janssen (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s "Perfect Mate"). The movie, scheduled to air in late July on Fox, is based on the independent comic book *Model by Day*, written and drawn by Kevin Taylor.

The film crew is busy setting up lights on two adjacent rooftops in downtown Toronto. Though the evening is cool, the mood on the set is warm and relaxed. On the sidewalk, crew members play with the toddler children of the male lead, Stephen (*A River Runs Through It*) Shellen, who plays police detective Eddie Walker. Co-star Shannon Tweed, in sexy black leather, poses for a photo with a passer-by. Upstairs, Loeb, in his long alpaca coat, cellular phone projecting from one pocket, looks the part of a Hollywood producer. Loeb is fond of comics: He has written them (*Challengers of the Unknown*, CS#18) and adapted them as possible films (*Reid Fleming*, CS#20). In a bedroom of the condo that his company has taken over for tonight's filming, Loeb puts his feet up, revealing his Batman socks. He laughs. "Be sure to mention this too," he says, fingering his Humphrey Bogart tie.

"What I liked about this comic book," he reveals, "was the funny idea that someone could be a supermodel/superhero. I had seen reporters and cops who became superheroes, but I had never seen Cindy Crawford become a superhero. The original intention was to do a series of movies, not unlike the Bond films. We could do *Model by Day* in Paris, in Hong Kong or anywhere in the world, because crime is everywhere.

"I took it to Matthew [Weisman]

and asked him whether or not he saw anything in it. The way our partnership works is, no matter what the other one thinks, it has to be 100 percent. You can't convince the other person, you just have to know that that's what you're going to do."

This highly consensual method has brought the pair to co-author such screen successes as *Commando* and *Teen Wolf*, even though they have quite different interests. Says Weisman, "I'm not interested in comics particularly. I liked them when I was a kid, I read *Dick Tracy*, but now I have no idea what the appeal is. I like movies. While my partner was more attached to the comic, I was more concerned with the movie we were making. This comic didn't come with much baggage. When you have a Spider-Man or Flash, many audience expectations come with it. I would have to immerse myself in the original material to be faithful to it. Nobody really knows *Model by Day* that well, so you can come up with a more original thing.

"I thought it would be an interesting exercise, trying to make the comic into something contemporary and hip for the screen, and at the same time true to its form. I read the comic and immediately forgot about it. We came up with our own vision of it."

Photos: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Fox Broadcasting Company All Photos: Alan Austin Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

"Our problem was, it was easy to find an actress who looked like a model, but we couldn't find a model who was a strong enough actress," notes producer Jeph Loeb. Actress Famke Janssen filled the role.

In the comic, Electra is a fashion model. Her roommate Jae, another model, is beaten up in the park, her eye injured permanently. Electra, angered, dons a costume and seeks revenge. In the movie, Lex is a top supermodel, her roommate Jae, a photojournalist. Jae is attacked and her eye damaged. The vengeful Lex puts on a costume and fights crime as a mysterious figure dubbed "Lady X" by the press. "Beyond that, there's not much similarity," says Loeb. "However, we feel that the tone, sensibility and power that Lex/Electra has are not different."

He elaborates, "There are limitations in television. The comic was more adult-oriented, and we were looking for something that would reach a general audience, including kids. In the comic, Electra is very sexually bold. In our movie, she is witty, coy and capable."

"She's ambiguous," Weisman adds. "If you describe her as somebody out of *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* and try to imagine them out at night, costumed and fighting crime, that's what we've done."

The heroine's race is without a doubt the most controversial change the producers have made: The movie's Lex is a white woman, while the comic's Electra is African-American. "I never knew that," says Weisman, "until Jeph explained it to me. I read the comic twice, and I never thought of her that way."

Loeb elaborates, "The comic was printed in black and white. The first 80 times I read it, it never occurred to me that Electra was black. I think Kevin chose a very safe middle ground in terms of the character's look, so you could see her either way."

"It wasn't a change of race, really," adds Weisman, "it was casting. We saw over 300 women for the role."

Loeb echoes the theme. "I don't know that we would have found anybody as good as Famke," he insists, "white, black, Hispanic or Asian. Second, while there is an Iman, while there is a Naomi [Campbell], it was Cindy Crawford as pitched to the network. I don't know if America is ready for a black woman to have a real relationship with a white cop. It just changed the movie's whole complexion. We tried to address that by casting an African-American as Master Chan, and an Asian as our bodyguard, Johnny Lee."

He outlines the casting process. "Lewis [*The Hitchhiker*] Chesler, our third partner on this movie, would come in every day with three or four more names. It became a nightmare. It was like, 'Oh, no. No more beautiful models and actresses.' Our problem was, it was easy to find an actress who looked like a model, but we couldn't find a model who was a strong enough actress. We had some very close runner-ups. Elle McPherson and Kathy Ireland wanted to do it. They were wonderful and charming. Clearly, having them would get us publicity, but we didn't want people confusing Lex with Elle or Kathy—we wanted to create a brand new personality.

"I was watching *The Next Generation*. We hadn't had anyone come in who was that beautiful and that strong. Finally, we were down to two women—we had to decide that day. Then, Famke walked in. I didn't

connect her with *The Next Generation*, but she sat down and knocked us out. The first thing we did was put her into martial arts training with David Lee, who trained Michelle Pfeiffer for Catwoman; and with Michael Vendrell, who trained Arnold Schwarzenegger for *Commando*. Famke fell in love with the role, so much so that my partner quips that she really puts on a mask and goes out and fights crime at night."

Loeb and Weisman have different takes on the characteristic violence of the genre they're adapting. Says Loeb, "We had to be very careful. We're not in *Death Wish* land. There is no moral center to *Death Wish*. He goes out and kills people, and that's a good thing. Lex originally sets out to avenge what happened to her roommate, and she catches the guys. Then, she finds out she's wanted for murder, the police are chasing her, she's teamed with a hit man and the mob wants to kill her.

"That she puts on a costume is one of the film's absurdities that hopefully people will go along with. It's in the same tenor as the fact that she takes martial arts from an African-American in a wheelchair, Master Chan. We play that perfectly straight. Her roommate's eye is injured, so she wears a patch and looks like a pirate. Lex's love interest is a cop so confused by life that he keeps popping aspirin. Lex's boss, the head of the modeling agency, played by Sean [*Blade Runner*] Young, knows everything that's going on in Lex's life and doesn't care, just so long as she shows up for work on the next photo shoot. So, when Lex decides to put on a costume, it almost seems like a *logical* thing, because everyone is so insane. So for us, the film's moral center is that these are not things you take on yourself. You cannot do that and *not* reap the whirlwind."

"Social significance?" asks Weisman. "I don't even discuss it. I don't care. I'm *not* glorifying violence or vigilantism—I hate *Death Wish*. I wouldn't make a film that I thought was a bad thing morally, but I don't believe in deep social relevance in film."

Shannon (*Fly By Night*) Tweed plays the copy-cat killer whose nocturnal predations get Lex in trouble with both the law and the Mafia. She also defends the film: "The violence is pretty fantasy-like because of the costumes. The violence somehow doesn't seem real when Superman does it—it *does* seem real when Charles Bronson does it. Shit happens. What about that woman

who shot the guy in the courtroom who molested her child, and wasn't going to get put away? Somehow I cheered for her, even though a man died. There's violence and then there's gratuitous, gory slasher violence."

Though *Model by Day* features plenty of beautiful women in scanty attire, its principals reject the idea that their movie is sexist. "In an odd way," Loeb insists, "we've written a strong feminist piece. The women in this movie sound like women, they have friendships with women, they are not all boytoys, they aren't all lusting after men, and I think Famke thinks the costume is both fun and funny. I'm hoping that women see that as well, that they don't think she is in some sort of sexy, slinky outfit that's intended to titillate. It's intended to titillate laughter in a positive way, if anything.

"If I can bring in a show that has enough smartness and comedy, then people will say that it's more than what it is. *Batman Returns* is ultimately Michael Keaton in a rubber suit, and Michelle Pfeiffer in a skin-tight, latex outfit. Is that sexist? I don't know, but it seems to work for people in a smart way. We're trying to be provocative, but we're doing it with enough fun that it's not *Candy Stripers*, or *Charlie's Angels* for that matter. Our original intention was to portray a strong female hero. Admittedly, she's in thigh-high boots, but she's in control of her life, she's not dependent on anyone, she lives with another professional woman and is smarter than anyone else in the film. One criticism of the first draft was that the men weren't smart enough."

The actresses involved are philosophical. "It's a network movie," says Tweed, laughing. "They have a certain look; *everybody* looks good. It's a formula that works. It has to do with sexy, beautiful women, only now, they're in more powerful positions. You can be a feminist and be sexy, *and* have a sense of humor. This movie would be sexist if I was doing all this kicking and not being paid as much as the guys getting kicked." Janssen, the star herself, adds, "There are no, or very few, films where women are not exploited."

"Because of the comic-book sensibility, we can get away with being a little pop," Loeb says.

Behind all these comments lurks the need for a TV movie to reach a wider audience than just comics fans. "I wrote a comics series, *Challengers of the Unknown*," Loeb points out. "The first issue sold 85,000 copies. That's a pretty good first issue. But if 85,000 people went to see a movie, you would have a big *disaster* on your hands.

"At first blush, I think we have an 18-to-30-year-old male audience, not unlike the comic-book audience, but because of the world of fashion, and because Famke Janssen is so charming, we have a shot at finding a female audience. *Charlie's Angels* didn't get to be Number One by having only a male audience, though our show is not *Charlie's Angels*. I'm saying that a show that was sold primarily on beautiful women somehow managed to cross over so that *everyone* in the family could enjoy it, and I think that's what we're doing.

"It's a very physical film. We're shooting some kind of a stunt or physical effect every day. Tonight we're throwing a stuntman off an eight-story building, and we're having Lex do a back-flip onto a balcony below her. That's one of the gags. A cop is pursuing her, she appears to fall to her death, but we cut to see that she has landed on a patio below. She then does what we hope is the dream of every teenage boy in America. She climbs through a window into a boy's bedroom. His walls are covered with magazine pictures of Lex as a model and her poster. She kisses the poster, writes her name on it and goes. We go from very strong suspense to Lex's wit in a tough situation.

"Kids will watch the show because it's a superhero concept that works. Teens will watch because it has great music and looks like an MTV video, and there's a hipness to it. Young males will watch it because we have the most beautiful women on television in it, and women will watch it because there's enough high fashion—$600,000 worth of designer clothes—enough humor and romance, because Steve Shellen is handsome enough and Lex is a strong enough character."

Despite television's limitations, the producers never considered bringing *Model by Day* to the big screen. "We're in the business of selling things," explains Weisman. "I don't think we could have sold this as a feature. We never even thought of selling it to the movies. It just seems a natural for television, with good series potential. There are many comic book adaptations out there, but not a lot on television."

"We knew there was no way ABC, NBC or CBS were just going to give us

(continued on page 62)

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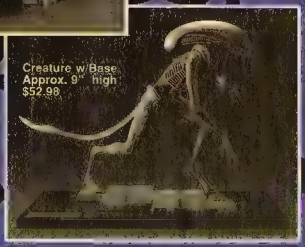
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CREATIVE DEMONS

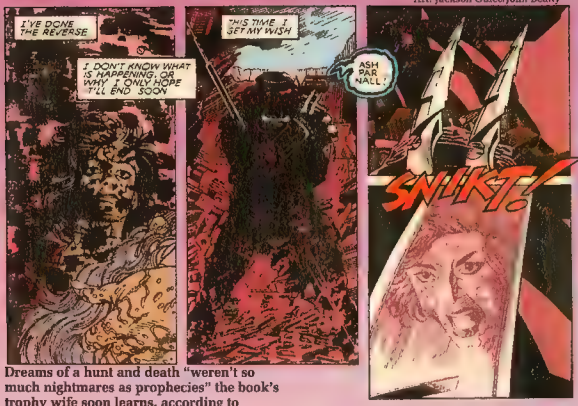
When Chris Claremont scripts, the Alien's sort of a good guy. And so's the Predator.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Art: Jackson Guice/John Beatty ALIENS & Predator:Trademark & Copyright 1993 20th Century Fox

Ash Parnall:Trademark & Copyright 1993 Chris Claremont

Art: Jackson Guice/John Beatty



Dreams of a hunt and death "weren't so much nightmares as prophecies" the book's trophy wife soon learns, according to writer Chris Claremont.

Where do you go after years of writing the bestselling title in comics? If you're Chris Claremont, you ride a Dark Horse to success with *ALIENS/Predator: The Deadliest of the Species.*

Claremont spent 17 years scripting the *X-Men*, guiding them from mediocre sales to one of comics' greatest success stories, before his abrupt departure from the mutant titles nearly two years ago. After time off to concentrate on his prose writing, Claremont has returned to comics—just don't call it a comeback!

"I don't know if coming back from 8.3 million copies is a comeback. 'Triumphant return' sounds much better," he jokes. "The difference is, what I'm doing now is much more on my own terms. *ALIENS/Predator* is a work-for-hire project, except that Ash Parnall, the Renegade character, is mine. After the *ALIENS/Predator* series concludes, there is every possibility that Renegade will be spun off into her own series, or we'll do a sequel."

ALIENS/Predator: The Deadliest of the Species is a 12-issue Dark Horse mini-series featuring a "trophy wife" married to a corporate magnate. "She has nightmares where she's being hunted and killed by a mysterious creature," says Claremont. "When she is kidnapped by the creature, she discovers that they weren't so much nightmares as prophecies. From there on in, it becomes a buddy picture, so to speak. The rude description we use around the office is '*Thelma and Louise* with serious attitudes, *really* big guns and an alien for a friend.'

"The twist that makes it more fresh and original than your standard story is that both the Alien and the Predator are on the *heroic* side of the equation. They are no less an Alien or a Predator, but hopefully, the audience will be rooting for them. I hope that it will give the book a measure of suspense that a more traditional portrayal of the Alien or the Predator wouldn't allow, because readers assume that the *humans* will win, since these are bad guys who have to bite the dust."

Although *ALIENS/Predator* may seem an unlikely choice for the former *X-Men* writer to mark his return to comics, Claremont is having a great time. "It's fun, because it isn't locked in by 20 or 30 years of continuity. It isn't restricted by corporate policy, the need to advertise an investment or to push exploitation of a product to the max. I can do pretty much what I want. And working with a character that I define completely, like Ash Parnall, is fun! Ideally, that's the way I would like to work from now on."

The writer is excited about creating his own comics characters and concepts, but still plans to work on company-owned projects that interest him.

"I have no problem with work-for-hire. I have a number of Superman projects I'm working on now," he says. "But, I want the projects I'm doing to speak as fully and completely as possible *of me*, not of an editor or publisher or a rule of continuity that existed before I was born. I want the stuff to be mine as much as theirs, and when it's not work-for-hire, I want it to be mine, period."

Claremont explains that a creator-owned project is much more difficult to arrange than a mainstream series, which is one reason that his work hasn't been appearing recently. "A work-for-hire mainstream series is very simple to set up. A more individual deal that's either creator-owned or work-for-hire, with significantly different terms than the standard

"The twist that makes [*ALIENS/Predator: The Deadliest of the Species*] more fresh is that both the Alien and the Predator are on the *heroic* side of the equation."

Art: John Bolton

agreement, takes a lot longer. I was talking with Jim Lee in late fall 1991 about working with Image—which is where the announcement of *Huntsman* in the early Image books came from. It was proposed as a project with Whilce Portacio, but then Whilce decided he would rather do his own *Wetworks* [CS #30]. The problem is that you have to approach Image with a package deal—you must have an artist before you walk in the door."

The writer has been frustrated in his prose writing, as well. "I have a three-book contract with Bantam, the first of which is a short prose novel I've written with my wife, [noted SF editor] Beth Fleisher, *Fairewell*. It will have painted and line illustrations by John Bolton. Even though the art and story are turned in, it won't be on sale for another 18 months because of the lead time that prose publishers require. I have a two-volume graphic novel project with Bantam—128 pages each—scheduled for 1995-96, but the original artist has backed out, so I have to find another artist. I'm back to square one." The first volume, *Hide and Seek*, features Queen Victoria's fictional grandchildren Richard and Alexandra.

Since his *X-Men* exodus, Claremont's only comics project which has appeared in the interim has been the *Star Trek: Debt of Honor* graphic novel. Obviously, it involved licensed characters with a lengthy history; nevertheless, Claremont didn't consider continuity or the work-for-hire aspect a problem.

"Continuity is *not necessarily* a restriction," he says. "They are the parameters through which the universe of the story is defined. The problem is not that *Star Trek* or *X-Men* had a continuity. The problem is that by the time I left, *X-Men* had *nine* different continuities for *X-Men*, for *Uncanny*, for *X-Factor*, for *X-Force*, for *Wolverine*, for *Excalibur*, for *Marvel Comics Presents*, for this, that and the other. All of those skeins had to be woven together into what Marvel editorial felt should be *one* unbroken tapestry. I had no trouble dealing with my continuity, with all the stuff I had created over the past 17 years. The problem I had was dealing with all the stuff that had been created all around me that was contradicting stuff I set up, and that I had no control over.

"With *Star Trek*, I gave [editor] Bob Greenberger my outline, he made his notes on it and passed it to Paramount, they made their notes and sent it back. I fixed it, it was approved, and we went on from there. It was a simple, straightforward situation. The rule of thumb I used on that was the rule I would have used if I were writing a fill-in issue of *Thor* or *Superman*, which is to try and leave the characters as they were. You put the toys back in the sandbox the way you found them. Again, writing a graphic novel is different from writing two years of the *Star Trek* series. If I were scripting the series on a regular basis, I would probably feel differently. A novel is a self-contained event, especially a novel like this one, which gets to span the entire gamut of the series. The trick was to make sure everything we used, as much as possible, had some basis in the fictional reality. If at all possible, you draw from the established history, use characters and situations that have been seen before, and make it fun."

Claremont admits to being a big *Trek* fan. "I enjoyed the hell out of it,

Art: Jackson Guice/John Beatty

Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

Following his "triumphant return" to comics, Claremont is now doing things "much more on my own terms."

X-Men Characters & Art: John Byrne/Terry Austin/Trademark & Copyright 1992, 1993 Marvel Entertainment Group Inc.

"My goal was to change things," Claremont explains of his *X-Men* plans. "I would have tried to introduce some lasting changes."

creative vision," he says. "The joy of writing a novel, as opposed to writing a graphic novel, is that you don't have to deal with an artist. The joy of working in a graphic novel form, as opposed to a novel, is that you get to deal with an artist. It gives you a chance to get a different perspective, to see a visual evocation of your work, as opposed to doing it all in your mind's eye."

Claremont is currently considering projects with most of the major comics companies. DC Comics' adaptation of Claremont's novel *First Flight* should be out in 1994. "I've turned in two issues of scripts, and French artist Christian Alamy is getting ready to start," he says. "I'm also doing the four-part Prestige format *Superman-Wonder Woman Elseworlds* with Dusty Abell. Dusty's pencils are coming in very slowly, but they're superlative, just magnificent. On one level, it's worth the wait, but on the other level, it's like, 'Will anything *ever* be finished?' "

The writer jokes that after many months away, all of his comics will probably hit the stores at the same time. "I wouldn't be surprised if, next summer, I'll be a glut all to myself! Competing with myself up and down, right and left, in and out!" he laughs.

He is more wistful and contemplative when he looks back on his 17-year run on the *X-Men* (which he discussed in the original CS #11, 1983; also in CS #2 & #17). "It was a lot of fun," he says. "It was a mixture of good and bad. If I had it to do over again—I don't know, it depends on the mood I'm in. But on the whole, I think it was a lot of fun. I got to work with some spectacular and I still do," he says, explaining that his affection was the reason he wanted to do the graphic novel. "I think everybody has one *Star Trek* story in them. Everybody has one Superman story, one Batman story to tell."

Jim Shooter announced Claremont's participation with his new Defiant Comics line (CS #36), though Claremont himself explains that nothing is actually firm at the moment.

"He has broached a series idea to me that he's interested in having me write," says Claremont. "I find the concept intriguing enough to think about. I'm not making any solid commitments until I finish the novel obligations I have to Ace-Berkeley and Bantam for *Sundowner*, and the first of a hardcover fantasy trilogy."

For the forseeable future, Chris Claremont's content to continue writing both prose novels and comics. "They speak to different aspects of the

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Art: Jackson Guice/John Beatty

Working in comics still appeals to Claremont. "It gives you a chance to get a different perspective, to see a visual evocation of your work."

people, and do some really good work. Hopefully, I laid the foundation for the really good work that I will do today, tomorrow and the days after."

Claremont admits to a degree of gratification in turning *X-Men*, a "midlist bi-monthly, about as low as you could get" into a phenomenon, but the "editorial differences" that led to his abrupt exit after 17 years left him with regrets.

"There's satisfaction to a certain extent," he says. "It's tempered by the fact that satisfaction doesn't pay the rent. Ideally, I would have wished for a different form of closure of my relationship with the series and with Marvel, but, it happens. That's partly why my approach to work in the future has changed as well. It's a situation that's *not* going to happen again."

The writer had extensive plans for the mutant team, plans that were radically different than the direction the comics are currently taking. "I had storylines planned out roughly through *Uncanny X-Men* #300," he says. "My goal was to change things. I would have liked to bring it to the point where Professor X *did* shuffle off this mortal coil, where Magneto was forced by circumstance to step forward and assume the mantle of the hero, like it or not. I would have tried to introduce some lasting, definitive changes in the characterizations of the core members, and throw in a few surprises—basically, I would have dealt with them as people and continued to show the audience their lives. One of the things I felt very strongly about was the emphasis on the book's core theme of prejudice, with a new wrinkle in their experience—instead of being simply objects of fear and hatred, they would become objects of desire. Mutants are useful, mutants have a tangible worth, they are a commodity with value. That can be good, and that can be bad. I wanted to show that in a more complete manner."

Claremont says he realizes that ultimately, Marvel dictates the types of stories they publish about their characters, and he would have to travel other routes to achieve personal satisfaction.

"Marvel is the corporate owner and author of record of the material, and is the final arbiter of the direction that they want to go," he says. "If I want to write my kinds of books, characters and stories without any significant degree of interference, then I have to go off and do my stories. As long as I do Marvel's stories or DC's stories, or even Dark Horse's stories, I owe them the first tip of the hat because it's theirs. By the same token, if [Dark Horse's] Mike [Richardson] wanted to do something with Renegade, then he owes me a tip of the hat, because she's mine."

Claremont left *X-Men* more than a year before the Fox animated series became a hit, and the writer has no connection with the cartoon.

"The only association that I am aware of with the cartoon series was that one of the writers came up to me in San Diego last year, and in blissful ignorance of how insensitive his words were, waxed terribly enthusiastic about how they were trying to be faithful to my work, and how they were using my stories as their templates, and how they were using my characterizations and dialogue—of course, they were fixing it and making it a little better, but he hoped that I would watch the series and feel that they were true to the standards that I had set," says Claremont. "I, of course, was standing there thinking that it never once dawned on him or his employers that if you're going to use my work, my contributions to the series, it might be a considerate thing to say, 'Would you like to do a bible for the series?' or 'Would you like to write one?' I don't think it was a venal act, I just think it never entered their minds. I have no connection with the series, and to the best of my knowledge, I have no recompense from it."

Claremont has made his peace with *X-Men* and is ready to move beyond it, but not without regrets. "The money was good. *X-Men* was a great, steady gig that carried

IT'S A WARM RAIN. THE AIR STEAMING.
NOT WHAT YOU'D EXPECT, AT THE ALTITUDE WE FLY.
BUT EVERYTHING ELSE ABOUT THE WORLD AND OUR LIVES HAS CHANGED. WHY NOT THE WEATHER?
I LET THE WATER WASH OVER ME, TELLING MYSELF THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR, THIS IS ALL IN MY IMAGINATION.
YAIII!
THEN I TASTE BLOOD.
I'VE NEVER BEEN HIT BEFORE.
BUT EVEN BEFORE I FULLY REALIZE WHAT'S HAPPENING...
..I'M HIT AGAIN.

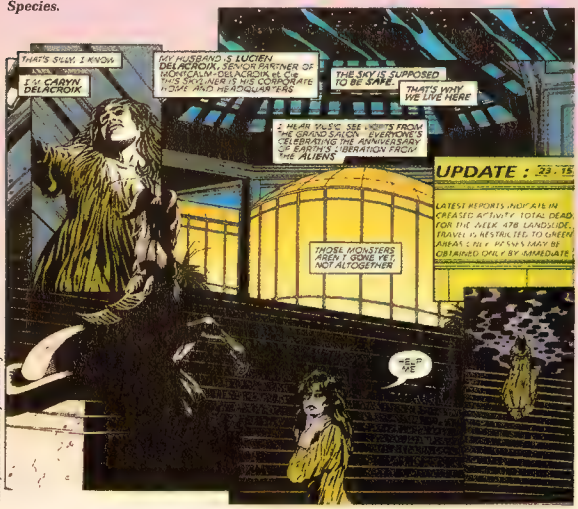
After his 17-year run on *X-Men*, Claremont notes, "There are problems involved with reestablishing yourself, creatively as well as commercially."

Art: John Bolton

with it its own cachet, but like it or not, it's over," he says philosophically. "There are problems involved with re-establishing yourself, creatively as well as commercially. On the other hand, the stuff that I'm doing now, in many respects, is much better than the stuff I was doing on *X-Men*. My working conditions are far better than they were at the end [of *X-Men*]. But Marvel and *X-Men* are *not* the center of the universe. I do miss the book—I miss *Excalibur*, I miss Wolverine. I created most of the characterizations, if not the characters themselves, and it's hard to walk away from people who have been such an intimate part of my life for such a long time. But, that's how it is."

The writer is taking on new challenges, prepared to apply the lessons he learned from *X-Men* to today's comics industry, which has been revolutionized by new, creator-friendly independents.

Working with the characters' continuities wasn't a problem for *The Deadliest of the Species*.


THAT'S SILLY. I KNOW.
I, LT. CARYN DELACROIX
MY HUSBAND, S. LUCIEN DELACROIX, SENIOR PARTNER OF MONTALAN-DELACROIX, THIS SHUTTLE IS HIS CORPORATE HOME AND HEADQUARTERS
THE SKY IS SUPPOSED TO BE SAFE.
THAT'S WHY WE LIVE HERE
I HEAR MUSIC. SEE LIGHTS FROM THE GRAND SALON. EVERYONE'S CELEBRATING THE ANNIVERSARY OF EARTH'S LIBERATION FROM THE ALIENS.
UPDATE : 23 : 15
LATEST REPORTS INDICATE INCREASED ACTIVITY. TOTAL DEAD FOR THE WEEK 478. LANDSIDE TRAVEL IS RESTRICTED TO GREEN AREAS ; NO PERSONS MAY BE OBTAINED ONLY BY MANDATE
THOSE MONSTERS AREN'T GONE YET, NOT ALTOGETHER
HELP ME

Art: Jackson Guice/John Beatty

"I can pretty much do what I want," says the writer. "And working with a character that I define completely is fun!"

"I'm basically taking the same passions, commitment, enthusiasm, talent and skill—if not better in every regard—and turning it toward creating concepts, characters, inventions and stories that will serve the same purpose, but will be mine. Ultimately, that will be more rewarding for me, and therein lies the genesis of Image, and some of the ways that Malibu, Dark Horse and even DC are trying to present themselves to the creative marketplace. If this change continues, I think eventually even Marvel will realize that even in a situation where they must own the characters and the concepts, there can be more equitable distribution of the wealth derived from them. Of course, they may not—that's their privilege as a company.

"One of the benchmark beliefs of Jim Shooter's career is 'Nobody forces you to work here,' and many of us were really pissed off at him for that attitude. 'What are you talking about?! You're forcing us out!' and he would say, 'No, you work here because on some level, you make the choice to work here. You make the decision. If you don't want to work here, go somewhere else.' And that's when it dawned on people that, 'Hey, we can do that! We *can* have financial and creative satisfaction.' It doesn't mean that people who leave Marvel won't come back, it doesn't mean that Marvel or any other company is inherently bad or good. It just means that creators are now coping with a degree of freedom that they didn't think they had. That has positive and negative elements—we are taking responsibility for our mistakes, instead of being able to blame it on the scummy old publishers! As we change, hopefully the marketplace will change. If this were an environment where Marvel and DC were the only two companies, we would be having a totally different discussion. By the same token, if a company comes along outside of Marvel or DC—if Image, for example, makes a legitimate go of it in a three-year, five-year or 10-year stretch, who knows what will happen as a result?"

No matter what happens in the future, Chris Claremont is excited to be a creator on the current comics scene.

"The fact is that the publishers really don't own *anything*. They have drawings on paper, conceptions, ideas, but they need writers and artists to turn those into a tangible reality," he says. "The writers and artists are standing up and saying, 'We want our fair share.' The balance of power is shifting, and companies are going to have to deal with it in the same way that we have to deal with it."

UNEARTHLY PLEASURES!

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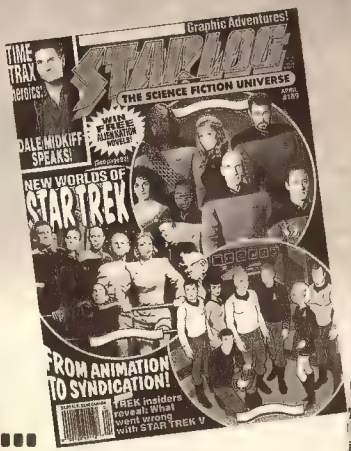

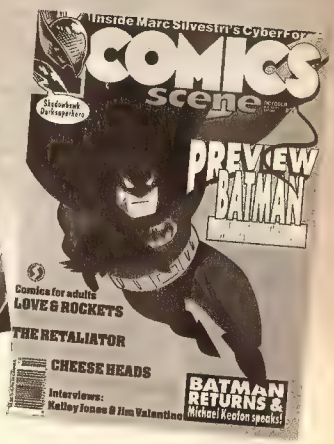

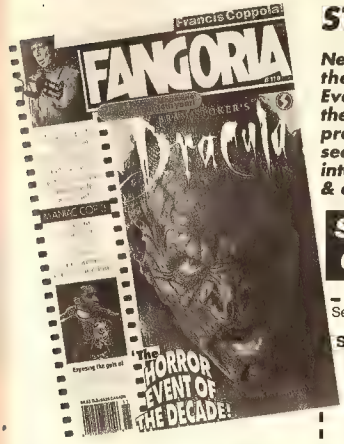

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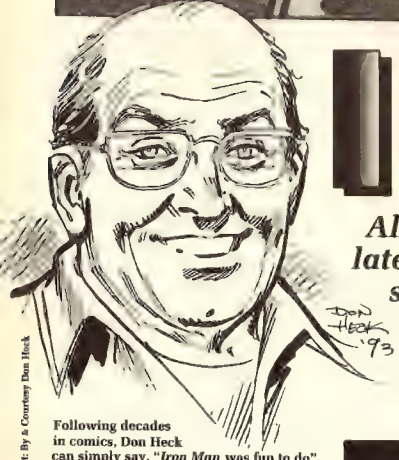


Art: By & Courtesy Don Heck

IRON M

Almost 44 years later, Don Heck is still drawing comics.

Part One

Following decades in comics, Don Heck can simply say, "*Iron Man* was fun to do" and really mean it.

By WILL MURRAY

"I always wanted to be a cartoonist," recalls Don Heck, "but I wanted to be a newspaper comic strip artist like Milton Caniff, as most people did in those days. I was always a great admirer of Caniff; Burma and the Dragon Lady were my favorites."

Don Heck never got his wish. Instead, he entered the field of comic books. He never imagined that 40 years later, he would still be working in the industry, or that he would play a major role in it—one that would lead to many of his stories becoming much-reprinted classics.

"December 1949 is when I started in

comics. I first worked for Harvey Publications, and I stayed there about two-and-a-half years. I did paste-up, white paint, reprints and ads—the usual garbage. Then, I started freelancing. There was somebody at Harvey's named Allen Hardy, who decided to start his own line, Media Comics, in 1952. He called me up and asked me to join. I was lucky because it was a perfect break-in period for him and for me. At Media, I worked on mysteries, weird stuff, war stories. I did a

One of the first features Heck did for Marvel was the "Torpedo Taylor" series in *Navy Combat*.

Torpedo Art: Copyright 1958 Manvis Publications, Inc

character called Duke Douglas in *Danger Comics* around 1953. After about six months, I did a war thing called 'Harrigan's Hat.' I did many of the covers. I even did the logos on the magazines—and anything else."

Those were exciting days for a young artist new to the comics field. "Ross Andru, Mike Esposito and Mike Roy worked for them. I had gone up to drop something off, and it was the first time I had seen Ross Andru's pencils. I looked at his stuff and said, 'Look how good that is.' You don't feel bad; you want to improve. I went home inspired to draw."

When Ant-Man became Giant-Man, Heck inked Jack Kirby's pencils.

A now-forgotten comics house, Media was deep in the clutches of the horror craze that would lead to a public outcry against violence and gore in the field. For them, Heck produced a ghoulish string of stylized covers for *Horrific*, oblivious to the coming storm. Heck's career might have been washed down the same sink as Media but for his landing a slot at the future Marvel Comics.

"Pete Morisi, [creator of *Thunderbolt*] who worked at Media at the same time, had been to Stan Lee's office, and he had brought his book. One of my stories was in there, and Stan kept going back to my story, saying, 'This is the way you should have done it.' Pete said, 'Look, if you want Don Heck to come up here, he's looking for work too. I'll tell him you're interested.' Stan said, 'Well, if he happened to walk up here, I might have a story for him.'

"So, I went up there on a Wednesday afternoon," Heck continues. "Stan never saw anybody on Wednesdays, and he never saw anybody in the afternoon. But, he came out. He looked at the first two pages and said, 'Aw hell, I know what your stuff looks like. Come on in, I got a story for you.'

"I started at Marvel, or Magazine Management as it was called at that time, in September 1954. Nothing special was happening at that point. The first job I did was about a whale breaking a ship apart. Then, I did 'Torpedo Taylor' for *Navy Combat*."

Heck's first stint at Marvel ultimately proved to be brief. In 1957, the Marvel line was reduced to a mere handful of titles—Lee let his writing staff go, and dropped the bulk of his artists. Heck was soon pounding the pavement. But it was a lean period for comics talent, and he found himself drawing model airplane three-views for Berkley Models.

A year later, Heck's next break was triggered by tragedy. Marvel mainstay Joe Maneely, at that time Stan Lee's favorite artist, fell from a commuter train and died. Suddenly, there was an empty chair in the bullpen.

"After Maneely died, Stan called to see if I would do some work," Heck remembers. "The price in those days was around $20 per page to pencil and ink, and I think DC's average was $38. It didn't pick up until 1964-65, and even then, it didn't go up all that much—a couple of bucks a page."

He was soon doing mysteries for *Strange Tales*, Westerns for *Gunsmoke Western* and war stories for *Battle*. Except for the fact that there was no longer an in-house bullpen of artists, little had changed.

"I really enjoyed Westerns and war stories because I could draw rougher kinds of stuff," says Heck says.

However, those two genres were falling into disfavor with readers, and increasingly Heck found himself doing short mystery and fantasy tales for *Tales to Astonish*, *Tales of Suspense*, *Journey into Mystery* and others with such newcomers to the company as Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. None of them knew it, but they were sowing

"Ororgo!! The Nightmare From Outer Space" represents the stories Heck brands "Arooga From Outer Space" SF tales.

I STILL REMEMBER HOW CLOSE I CAME TO DEATH WHEN MY POWER GAVE OUT DURING MY BATTLE WITH THE BLACK KNIGHT!
I COULDN'T GO THROUGH THAT AGAIN--I WOULDN'T DARE!
AND YET, I HAVEN'T THE COURAGE TO REMOVE MY IRON ARMOR... I DON'T DARE GAMBLE WITH MY DAMAGED HEART! I'M A PRISONER OF IRON MAN... OF MY OWN CREATION!
WHAT CRUEL TRICK OF FATE IS THIS?? I'M ONE OF THE STRONGEST, MOST POWERFUL, MOST FEARED HUMANS ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH! THERE IS NOTHING I CANNOT ACCOMPLISH... NOTHING I WOULD NOT DARE!

Art: Don Heck/Dick Ayers

Devising Tony Stark's playboy-like look was Heck's task.

the seeds for the Marvel Age of Comics.

"That's one of the things Marvel did which was nice," Heck acknowledges. "Stan got a bunch of talented people doing all this stuff, and it all looked different. Kirby would generally do the first story in the book, a 10-pager, and we would wind up doing five-pagers and six-pagers. Kirby was better at monster stories; he was a creative genius. He could take *anything* and make it into something."

Contrary to the picture often painted of a tight-knit staff working together in an atmosphere of camaraderie, Heck seldom visited the Marvel offices, bumping into his fellow "bullpen" artists only rarely.

"The Bullpen wasn't *anything* at that point!" he laughs. "The Bullpen was this small office Stan Lee had, where, if you happened to walk in, you would probably have to repair somebody else's job, because Stan told the guy, 'I need it tomorrow, and it's six pages. Could I have it?'

"Once a week I would get a script in the mail. I had no idea where it was going. There was no 'Bullpen communication.' When you sent in a story, you didn't know where it was going to be used. I always figured if it was the first story or the last, then you were all right. If you wound up in the number three slot, they didn't think much of the story."

Heck professes no lingering nostalgia for that era, which was dominated by what he dismisses as "Arooga From Outer Space" SF tales.

"I was more interested when the story took the whole book," Heck admits. "You would have more time to develop things, rather than bang, bang, bang, here we are in New York, then we go over to Paris. You had all these changes in five pages, and you're only getting $20 a page. Big deal. Try to think of *Star Wars* in five pages."

Although Heck drew the cover of *Tales of Suspense* #1—the title with which he is most identified—he seldom did covers for Marvel. Kirby usually handled that chore.

"That's because I was further out," Heck reveals. "I was about 60 miles from the city. I didn't go in that much. Kirby lived about 20 miles out. Therefore, Jack would be in there all the time delivering stuff and while he was there, he would be doing covers. Of course, he was the fastest guy around, too! Five pages a day.

"If I do a couple of pages a day," Heck adds, "that's fine; I'm very happy. I never was that super-fast. I try. It all depends on how many people the writer has put into the story. If the writer says, 'Suddenly, over the hill, comes a whole army—300 people.' What the hell does it take on the typewriter, 300 people?"

When monsters gave way to superheroes, and the Marvel Age of Comics began to take shape, Heck made the transition. Initially, the new direction Lee was pushing the company in caught him by surprise. "I didn't know about *Fantastic Four* #1 when it came out," he admits. "The first one I got was #7."

"Suddenly, rivets were put into it," Heck notes of Shellhead's helmet.

THEY'RE SUSPICIOUS! THEY KNOW I'M KEEPING SOMETHING FROM THEM! BUT I CAN NEVER TELL THEM! WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT--WHEN TONY STARK DOES NOT RETURN?
MORE NEXT ISH (AS IF YOU DIDN'T KNOW!) AND NOW, ANOTHER TREAT FOR YOU--CAPTAIN AMERICA FOLLOWS THIS TALE...

Heck is probably most identified with Iron Man, who first appeared in *Tales of Suspense* #39, in a story written by Larry Lieber, which Heck pencilled and inked. The character is usually credited to Lee and Kirby. The truth, as Heck recalls it, is much more complicated.

"If you look at the thing," Heck points out, "it listed that Kirby laid out the first Iron Man story, which was *Suspense* #39. Which is *not* true; Kirby did #40. I think he did the layouts on that. But you would have to see the layouts to appreciate it, because many times—which was fine, he wasn't getting paid that much for it—it would be almost like what Ditko did sometimes, stick figures. The reason Kirby designed the character is because he was in the city, and the covers were *always* done first."

Heck remembers the beginnings of Iron Man as a casual affair. "Stan called me up and told me that we were going to have this character, and his name was Iron Man. That he was Tony Stark, and the way he was wounded in Vietnam. It was just a synopsis over the phone; we didn't actually sit down and work out the character and the rest. I knew what the costume looked like because I got the cover in the mail."

After inking Kirby's famous cover depicting the not-yet-Golden Avenger, it was left to Heck to conceptualize the man under that lead-grey suit.

HELLO! YOU SAY YOUR NEXT PLANE LEAVES FOR NEW DEHLI, INDIA? THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH! RESERVE ONE SEAT IN THE NAME OF TRAGO! HE'LL BE RIGHT THERE!
WELL, I GUESS THAT'S THE LAST WE'LL HEAR OF THE MAN WITH THE MAGIC TRUMPET! LET'S GO!
AWW... AND HE PLAYED SUCH A MELLOW HORN!
5

"I enjoyed doing Ant-Man after a while," Heck says. "And I had the Wasp. I like to draw girls, obviously."

"I would be thinking along the lines of some character I liked, which would be an Errol Flynn type. The features I'm thinking of here—a handsome guy who was wealthy. The fact that he was rich was nothing to me because I never knew many people like that anyway."

For a character who celebrates his 30th anniversary this year, Iron Man's early years were tumultuous ones, punctuated by endless tinkering and character redesigns. Heck himself tried to place his own stamp on the Iron Man look from the beginning.

"I always tried to put a face, almost like a skull, on Iron Man," he reveals. "I was thinking of a skull look, especially when he got the new costume. I didn't do that, either. Ditko did it."

As Heck sees it, the drastic but pivotal redesign of Iron Man's bulky golden armor in *Suspense* #48 could have gone to anyone. "If I had happened to have walked in there and Stan said, 'Hey, we're changing the costume,' I would have designed it. But if I had gone in there, I probably wouldn't have had *any* sleep. God *knows* what it would've looked like!"

In fact, Heck had just been reassigned to Thor in *Journey into Mystery*, leaving *Iron Man* in Ditko's hands for a three-issue period—although Heck inked Ditko's first issue, Stark's last in his original armor.

After the new, streamlined Iron Man was introduced, Heck abruptly returned, where he continued to tinker with different helmets—not always by choice.

"Suddenly, rivets were put into it," he says. "That was stuff that I got in. 'We're changing this.' I guess it wasn't selling that well. Back in those days, if Spider-Man suddenly made a guest appearance, you knew the book wasn't selling that well."

Heck was also responsible for the basic design of many of the classic Iron Man villains still in use today, such as Titanium Man, the Black Widow (later a heroine), the Crimson Dynamo and the one that Lee has often lamented was a sure sales killer—the Mandarin.

"The Mandarin was Stan's character," says Heck. "He said to me, 'I want a character like Fu Manchu, who's a Shakespearean type who would put his hand to his head and rant and do stuff like that.' Those things were what Stan wanted in his characters. Even Iron Man. He would say, 'Stark's walking around thinking of all his problems, etc., etc."

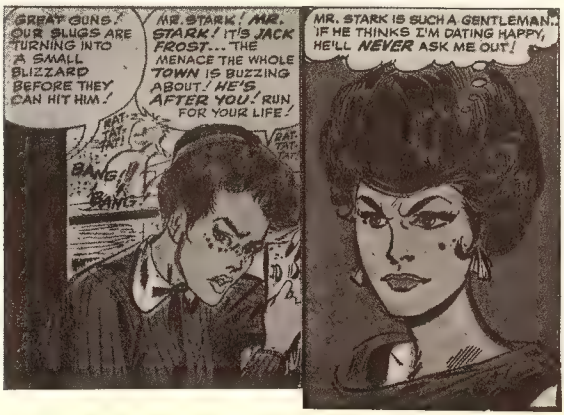
Heck frankly concedes that he was never a big fan of superheroes, so the introduction of two supporting characters, freckle-faced Pepper Potts and homely Happy Hogan, in *Tales of Suspense* #45 gave him some welcome human-interest fodder.

I COMPLIMENT YOU, IRON MAN! YOU HAVE GIVEN ME THE MOST STIMULATING BATTLE OF MY CAREER! BUT ALL THINGS MUST END--AND MY BLACK LIGHT RING BEAM WILL END THIS HERE AND NOW!

"The Mandarin was Stan's character," says Heck.

Pepper Potts was introduced to add human interest. Stan Lee insisted that she be pretty. So, she got a makeover.

"If she's homely and she winds up going out [with Tony Stark], then it's a big deal," notes Heck. "If she's pretty, who cares?"


GREAT GUNS! OUR BUGS ARE TURNING INTO A SMALL BLIZZARD BEFORE THEY CAN HIT HIM!
MR. STARK! MR. STARK! IT'S JACK FROST... THE MENACE THE WHOLE TOWN IS BUZZING ABOUT! HE'S AFTER YOU! RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!
BANG!! BAM!
MR. STARK IS SUCH A GENTLEMAN. IF HE THINKS I'M DATING HAPPY, HE'LL NEVER ASK ME OUT!

"They were *people*," he observes. "I used to think of Pepper Potts as Josie from Bob Cummings' *Love That Bob* [actress Ann B. Davis, later of *The Brady Bunch*]. She was always interested in the boss and never could go out with him, and she's thinking of all these dumb broads Stark is going out with. Happy Hogan was just a pug type, like Joe Palooka."

As Heck sees it, these promising characters served as a counterbalance to Tony Stark's jet-set glamor, but were undermined by editorial second thoughts. "Stan called and said he wanted Pepper to be prettier," Heck laments. "That wasn't my idea. As far as I was concerned, that killed it. If she's homely and she winds up going out, then it's a big deal. If she's prettier, who cares?

"Then, Stan said, 'Make Happy handsomer.' I liked him with his banged-up ears and crooked nose. He was fun to do at that point. When suddenly everybody had to be pretty, then I didn't like him."

Still, Heck remembers his stint on Iron Man—ultimately the formative first three years of the series—positively. "*Iron Man* was fun to do," he

All Iron Man, Ant-Man, Wasp & Related Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1969 Marvel Entertainment Group

After using a rapidograph for "The Mad Pharoah" in *Suspense* #43, Heck was told by Lee to draw more like Kirby. Lee felt that Heck drew too realistically.

admits. "I enjoyed it because when I was doing Tony Stark, I was being more or less inspired by stuff that Alex Toth was doing. I saw Toth was working with a rapidograph, so I did an Egyptian Iron Man story ["The Mad Pharoah," *Suspense* #43] and it was the first time I had used a rapidograph. I had a chariot-type thing with a bunch of horses, and Stan complained I drew it too realistically! He wanted more Kirbyish stuff."

The pressure to emulate Kirby's bravura style was something Heck says he learned to cope with. "Well, Stan would say, 'Think of Jack Kirby when you're doing this.' I would say, 'OK,' and then go do it my way. If you're not your own person, you're not going to accomplish anything, because the editor will change his mind tomorrow."

"I always tried to put a face, almost like a skull, on Iron Man," he says.

Artistic Conversations

While toiling away on Iron Man, Heck also worked on another troubled Kirby creation—Ant-Man. As always, his approach to the strip was his own.

"I enjoyed doing Ant-Man after a while," Heck says. "When I started thinking of it as *Gulliver's Travels*, it became easy to do. And I had the Wasp. I like to draw girls, obviously."

As with Iron Man, Heck found himself working with scripters other than Lee. They included Larry Lieber and Robert Bernstein, who wrote Iron Man as "R. Berns," as well as Ernie Hart, who used the pen name "H. E. Huntley" on his Ant-Man tales. Then, one day, Lee introduced the Marvel Method of feeding his artists plots and scripting from the pencilled breakdowns, effectively making the artist a co-author.

"That started in the '60s," according to Heck. "What happened was, Stan

BUT IT MAY BE LATER THAN THEY THINK-- MUCH LATER--
THERE'S THE BOTTOM NOW--!
UNLESS I MISS MY GUESS, THAT'S A DEADLY POOL OF ACID BELOW ME!!
WHICH MEANS IT'S TIME TO MAKE A BREAK FOR IT-- FAST!
BEFORE REACHING THE FATAL LIQUID BELOW, THE POWERFUL AVENGER LASHES OUT WITH TWO IRON FISTS, SMASHING HIS WAY THRU THE SIDE OF THE SMOOTH, SLIPPERY PIPE...
CRASH!
Design & Layout Calvin Lau

"If you're not your own person [doing your art], you're not going to accomplish anything, because the editor will change his mind tomorrow," Heck declares.

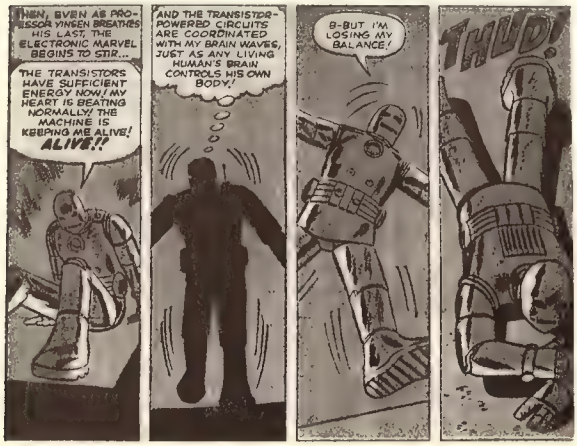
got rid of a bunch of writers. I know why he got rid of one of them. I was doing an Iron Man story, and in the first 10 pages, Iron Man wasn't even in the story! Stan was a little upset, and I can't blame him. Because Iron Man wasn't in there, I had to draw him in a few panels as a thought balloon, so at least the character would be shown."

Heck was not originally enamored of Lee's new approach. "When Stan first started talking about working from a synopsis, I said, 'You're crazy!' He said, 'Don't worry, you can do it.' "

Since he seldom came to the office, Heck took Lee's plots over the phone, tape recording them for later playback. "I would put the whole thing together with all the pictures and send it in," Heck explains. "When I got it back and read it, I said, 'Gee, it works fine. It's great.' "

In those days, it was a true collaboration, with the artist supplying suggested dialogue on the art itself. "We always wrote everything on the side," insists Heck. "It's not like today where you don't see anything in the borders. If you were thinking of something, you wrote in what you thought as dialogue, so Lee would know what you were thinking when you drew the character.

Before he was a golden avenger, Iron Man really was a man of iron.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THUD!

This character's not just standing there, blah, he's saying, 'Holy cow, I'm going to kick the hell out of this guy'—It was semi-writing."

When declining sales prompted Lee to revamp Ant-Man, Kirby was brought in, introducing the Wasp in *Tales to Astonish* #44 and transforming Ant-Man into Giant-Man in *Astonish* #49. Each time, Heck inked Kirby's pencils to preserve the feature's look.

Although their styles were extremely dissimilar, Heck enjoyed the few times he got to ink the King. "It was different because I was more realistic in certain cases," Heck says. "I would try to improve it the way I saw it. That doesn't mean I was better or anything. I still do that today if I ink somebody. I'll re-pencil parts even if I'm not getting paid for it."

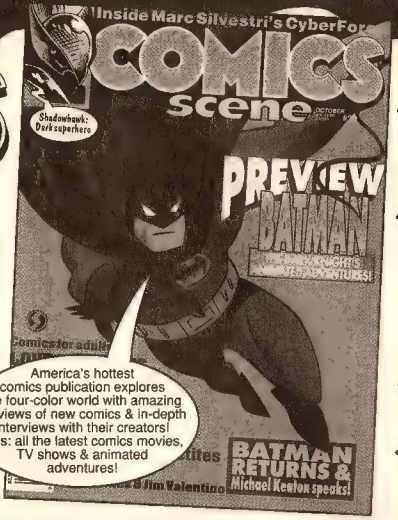
Nor did Heck resent taking a back seat when Kirby was brought in to doctor an ongoing feature. "I always figured Kirby was the creative figure at Marvel," he states. "He created most of the characters. To me, that was wonderful because the characters he would normally create were good—and fun to do.

"Anytime you see a change," Heck adds, "it's probably sales. One of the few characters who didn't change was Spider-Man, because he always sold, although I could never figure it out. That stuff never jelled in my mind. But it worked fine. It still does. The fact that I didn't see it right away doesn't make any difference."

Heck left the strip once Ant-Man became Giant-Man, and it eventually faded away. By that time, the artist had moved on to a book with which he would be associated for three solid years, *The Avengers*.

TO BE CONTINUED

COMICS scene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Model

(continued from page 45)

two hours and let us make it," continues Loeb. "They would want to develop the script and see everything. We had heard that Fox was looking for a hip, Fox-audience crime fighter. They immediately understood that we wanted to do a show that was tongue-in-cheek but *not* camp, that had humor to it and lots of action, and they fit it into their schedule."

Social issues and marketing concerns aside, Loeb relishes his task of adaptation. "I couldn't *not* produce a superhero show," he enthuses. "I mean, 30 years of being a comic book fan has to pay off. I've collected comics for 23 years. I read everything. I probably spend $300 a month on comics. I write comics. I've always felt that comics and film are, if not sisters, then cousins."

Loeb pulls out storyboard pages for the film. "As you can see, we're doing a comic book. I could put dialogue balloons in here. As a writer, this is the way that I think—I see screen images the same way that I see them in a comic book. This was done by our director, Christian [*Scanners II*] Duguay and an artist, and then it comes back to me and Matthew. This enables us to see what the director and writers have in mind, and what the producers can afford. Comics that are well done can be storyboards [for films]. I think the two media have influenced each other. I can't think of any Neal Adams images that don't remind me of film. I think the work of Rob Liefeld and Jim Lee is beautiful, but it does tend to get more and more *away* from film.

"Because of the comic-book sensibility," Loeb continues, "we can get away with being a little pop, so we've chosen architecture, colors and costumes that are a little stronger than a reality-based show. Lex drives a bright red car and Eddie drives a lime green Olds Delta '88. There are orange punkmobiles, and everywhere they go the walls are lit in yellow and green. We've used as our yardstick the fact that we don't have the money to do a *Batman* movie, but we would like to achieve something as close to that look as possible. On the other hand, what we don't want is the *Wonder Woman* TV series. Hopefully, we've found something in between, with a little *Dick Tracy* thrown in too.

"I really have a lot of problems with comics where the heroes brood constantly about what they're doing and why," Jeph Loeb grins. "Electra really got off on what she was doing. Throughout all the panic and insanity, she's really having more fun than any of us."

Lee

(continued from page 28)

You put on a big pair of leather biker boots or something; you can certainly draw on things like that to develop a character.

CS: And the two hours a day of putting on the makeup?

LEE: It's really not that bad. And when it's on, it's not as severe as, say, the actor's mask in *The Elephant Man.*

CS: How does the costume reflect the character?

LEE: The costume is basically just some of Eric's old clothes that he finds.

CS: What about the element about him where he takes something from each victim he eliminates?

"He's emotionally hyper-alive. Because he realizes that each of those moments [he comes across] is *never* going to happen again."

LEE: There's kind of a ritualistic, totemistic feel to it. There's a line that came purely from the comic book, where Eric, after having killed one of the guys, took a spent shell casing from his gun and tied it in his hair. And, in the comic, the line was, "To build a temple to sadness, he ties a spent shell casing in his hair. 'One,' he says." And I think that's the influence for Eric collecting an item from each person.

CS: Do you feel there are echoes of Edgar Allan Poe and *The Raven*?

LEE: The piece touches on many things like that. I mean, I'm quoting poetry from Poe and others. For some reason, I personally remember song lyrics—I always do. I can't help it; if I hear a song once, I know all the lyrics to the song. And when I'm driving or performing some other repetitive, mindless activity, I tend to recite song lyrics to myself that usually seem appropriate to the situation.

And, to me, when Eric is reciting poetry in the film, they're just thoughts that come into his mind and seem to match. He was a songwriter in his life, he was a road man, and I think that he has stored up in his mind hundreds and hundreds of lyrics from songs and pieces from different poetry that he has read. And he uses those to express what's going on with him at different times in the film.

CS: Tell me about working with the director, Alex Proyas.

LEE: He has a really, really strong visual sense. He's bringing a truly great look to this film. He's a very stylistic filmmaker, you know—like the early Ridley Scott or Joel Schumacher films had a very definite look to them. And Alex is doing a fantastic job in creating a very definite look for this film. It's very dark, both literally and emotionally. He has taken a lot of color out of the surroundings, except for certain key times when we use color, too.

For example, any sequence that's a flashback to Eric's life when he was alive, before he and Shelly were killed, we're shooting in a much more color-saturated, light environment than the rest of the film. Another great thing Alex has invented is what we call "Crow-vision": The character of Eric is able to see the world through the eyes of a crow, and when he sees the world in that fashion, Alex has created a wonderful effect which is Crow-vision in the film—it's black-and-white, it's distorted, and...you just have to see it.

CS: Any other special problems about *The Crow*?

LEE: I've had to keep reminding myself of the situation constantly in playing this part, simply because sometimes it's easy to lapse into thinking that you are alive, and that the character you're playing is a man—but that's not the case. In the scene we're shooting right now, when the cops come in through the door, and train all their guns on Eric and tell him to freeze, we did an interesting thing late last night. (We worked 19 hours yesterday, until about 4 a.m.)

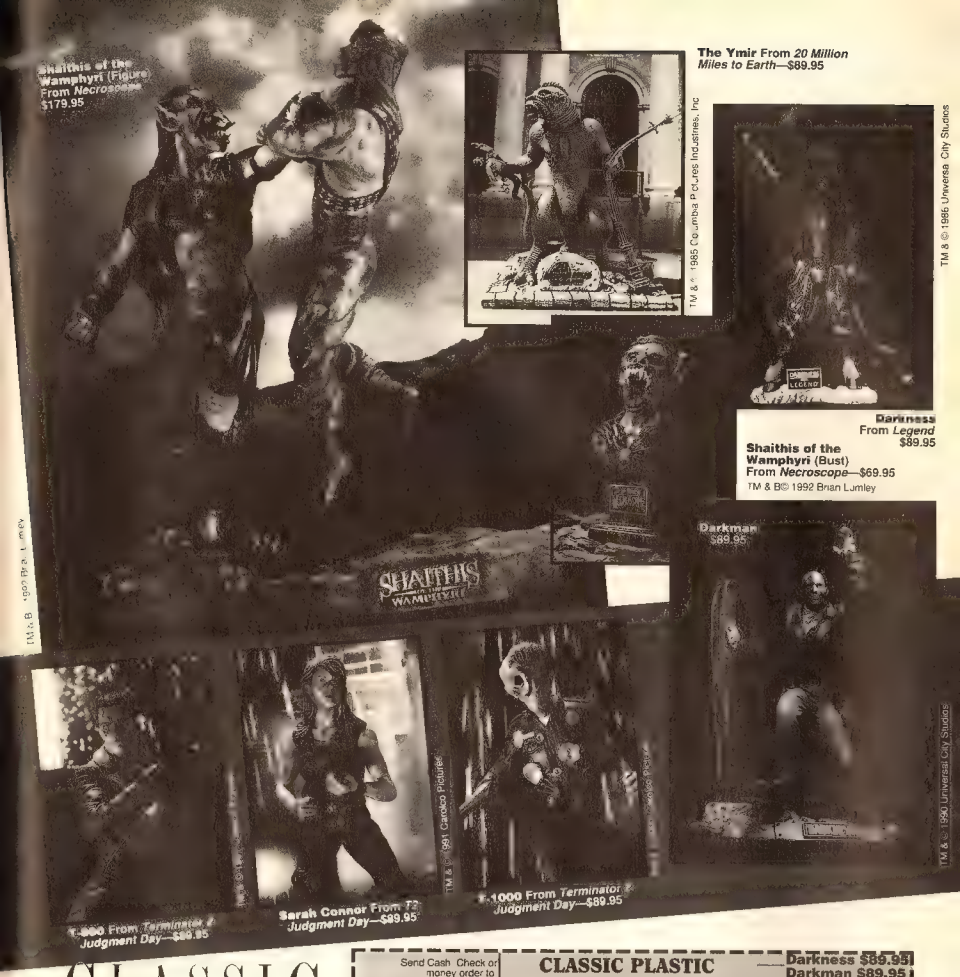
The cops trained their guns on me and said, "Freeze!," and I did this kind of Looney Tunes dance [*giggles*] out of the room, as opposed to a more traditional turning and running. Because the fact of the matter is that Eric doesn't have to do that, you know? There's no reason he wouldn't do a Looney Tunes dance out the door. [*Laughs.*] And we've had many times where I've suggested things to Alex, and he has looked at me for a second like, "Are you kidding?" [*Laughs.*] And then we've managed to get them into the film.

CS: Given the nature of the part and the late hours, can you just take off the makeup after work and go to sleep, or does it take a few hours of unwinding?

LEE: Well, the majority of the time, by the time I get home, I'm so tired that I just go to sleep—to tell you the truth.

CS: But you feel fulfilled?

LEE: Yeah, most of the time.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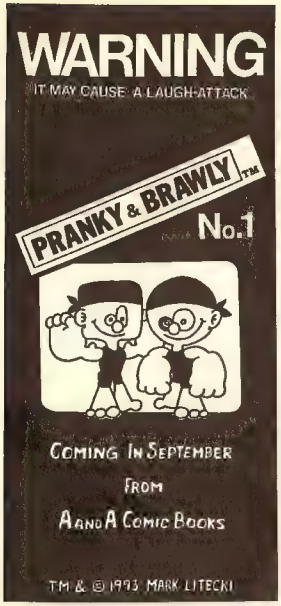
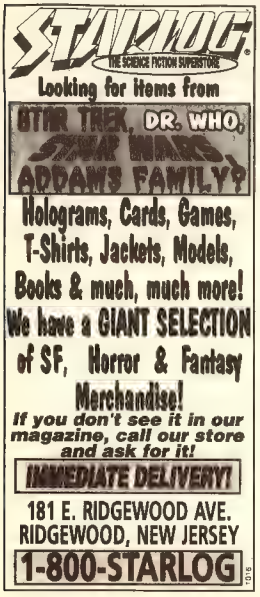




Worthless

(continued from page 20)

A year later, Martin Goodman, having sold Marvel Comics at a tidy profit, plowed some of that back into a new company, Atlas/Seaboard Comics, which was run by his son, Chip. It was a major newsstand comics line, the first in the post-Silver Age era.

I know of people who to this day have stacks of bagged copies of such immortal titles as *Ironjaw*, *Phoenix*, *The Scorpion*, *The Destructor*, etc., stashed in their cellars, neatly bagged and never to be read. Why? The ordinary reader never got excited by Atlas—it failed. Today, they guide out at about a buck per copy, mint. And despite the fact that some titles featured art by Neal Adams, Mike Ploog, Steve Ditko and Howard Chaykin, you can't move them with a forklift.

This is another important collecting truism: If a comics line dies out, eventually interest and price will wither. This is why to this day, the most sought-after comics are either DCs or Marvels. Most of the rest are worth only small change. If Marvel had gone out of business in the '60s, they would be curiosities today with modest values, like *Brother Power, the Geek*. If Image, Valiant, Malibu, Topps, Defiant or any of the newer houses (take your pick) fail, the value of their books is doomed to shrivel. And even if they succeed, their books are unlikely to grow much in *true* value, even if the price does appreciate over time. Why? First, there's the inexorable inflation that will erode the book value year after year.

But more importantly, current hot comics share the same Achilles' heel that post-1970 copies have. *Everybody's* saving them; nobody's throwing them out. Thus, the recollector market that would normally kick in around the year 2025 simply *won't* happen. And whatever 2025 collectors may be looking for 1993 comics won't have to search far for a pristine mint copy. There will be thousands of them available—unread. If the collector of 2025 doesn't like your pricing, he won't have to haggle, fearful he won't find a copy as good as yours elsewhere—he'll just go on to the next table. Imagine the price wars to compete for the pool of collectors in 2025! More than likely, you'll see that stuff in the $10 bins (inflation, remember?), and the investor/speculator will be eating paper once again.

The sad fact is that every time the collector and investor/speculator jump on a new title, line or character in large numbers, they get burned. Sure, prices may go up in the short run, but the supply quickly outpaces the demand. Examples? *Conan* #1. *Howard the Duck. G.I. Joe. Watchmen. The Dark Knight Returns. Secret Wars.* All once hot, now lukewarm.

So if virtually every 1993 fan is buying *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* #1, how can it appreciate in value? The early Marvels are only as valuable as they are today for their scarcity in mint condition, as well as their historical importance and desirability. They were underdistributed and often ignored in favor of DC's titles.

I guarantee you that if there had been investor/speculators around when *FF* #1 came out, it would not be worth the money it is today. Sure, *FF* might be just as popular and desirable a book, but there would be *tons* more of them out there, most in very fine to mint grade. An awful lot of *FF* #1s were thrown out after reading. Those that were saved got pretty ragged. Even so, I've seen as many as six nice copies on one dealer's table at a given time. If you want an *FF* #1 and are willing to pay *Guide*, it's an easy book to score.

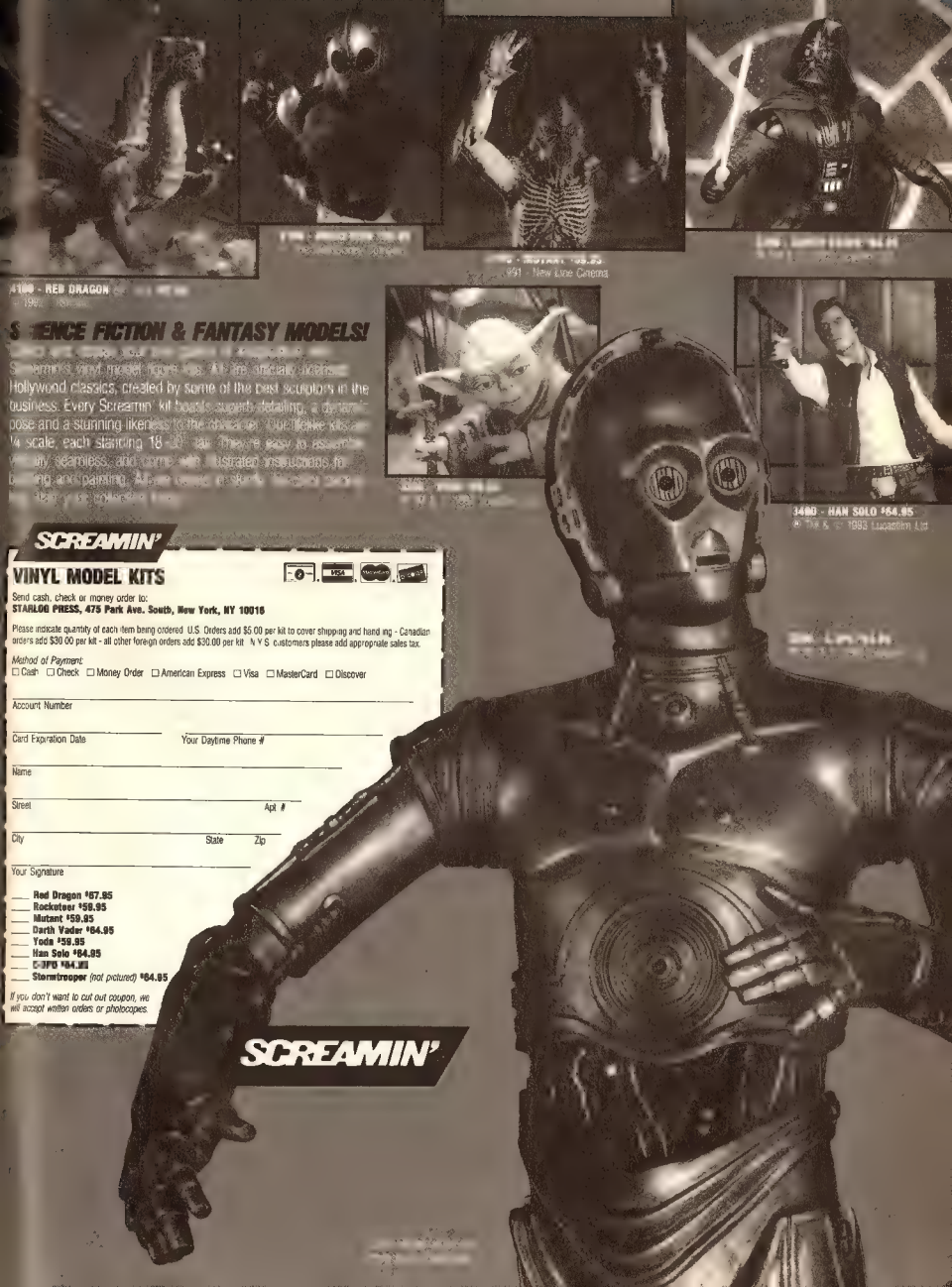
There's a saying in the stock market that when the little guy jumps in, then the market has peaked. Why? The little guy will only invest in a sure thing; sure things *never* pay off. It's the same with comics; if a comic is being touted as "hot" before it's even printed, it's not. Guaranteed.

In 1993, comics sales are higher than they have been in decades, but readership is down. Drastically. That is, actual readership (i.e. people who buy comics simply to *read* them). With the millions of issues of certain Image titles, *X-Men* #1 and Todd McFarlane's *Spider-Man* #1 being sold above actual readership, it would take a major upturn in demand for those books to hold even their cover price. How major? Try exponential.

Apply a little common sense. Sure, Valiant's readership is growing. But if it was growing that much, how is it you find tons of mint copies of most titles on every third dealer's table? If they were scarce enough to be worth 20 times cover price, the dealers would be sold out by now. *Wouldn't* they?

Comic book readership is *not* growing exponentially. And that's what it will take for these "hot" new titles to hold their value. They can't. They won't. Moral? It's an old one: Buy what you read, read only what you enjoy—and above all, pay only what a book is worth to *you*.

Because if you're buying new comics to put yourself or your child through college, you're fooling yourself. It's all *windhandel*. Just trading in the wind.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Avengers

(continued from page 13)

think about it, they had Ultron. And they had Ultron. And...um...Ultron again. There were the Sons of the Serpent and other characters—usually they were borrowed villains. So what I tried to do with Proctor and the Gatherers was to give them a specific group developed out of Avengers history. We're going to bring in this Kree strike force in the next few months. They're there specifically to get the Avengers, again because of what happened back in Galactic Storm. I think a team is defined by who they fight. It also makes the Avengers more cohesive, if there's a group that's against them.

"It's important that there are repercussions to deeds done in the stories. That *makes* it a story. Which is why, when we did this thing, way back when, with the Supreme Intelligence, I said, 'This one act can't end right there. This is how life is. You do something like that, people want to get revenge on you. And you must pay a price for committing an act like that.' That's also fun to think about. You think of a story and you think, 'OK, it's over, but what are the repercussions?' And you get other stories out of that."

Harras says he runs many of his ideas past penciller Steve Epting and inker/colorist Tom Palmer. "What I like about it is that both of these guys, whom I like a lot, are very much involved in the book, and they really want to make it the best book possible—that really makes a difference as a writer. Epting is phenomenal. I think he's one of the best guys around, and I don't think many people know that. When I write a plot, it's amazing; when I get it back from Steve, I go, 'Yeah. That's exactly what I want.' It's scary sometimes, it really is. Tom Palmer is one of the nicest guys in the business, a real gentlemen. Once he finishes inking the book, he reads it, and he always sends me a note telling me what he thought of the issue. He calls me up and we discuss things. They both bring such an enthusiasm to the book, and I hope they stay on it a long time, because I really enjoy working with them.

"I'm pleased with the mail *The Avengers* is getting," Bob Harras says. "It seems to indicate that readers are pleased that the characters are characters again, and that's the reaction I wanted. The mail is about how involved people are getting in the characters' lives. The Knight-Crystal kiss a few months ago: Some people loved it, some people hated it, and that was cool. I want to see what people are going to react to."

Catwoman

(continued from page 33)

lidity in all the various presentations.

"The fact of the matter is that the further along I get with her, the more I find that every time I think I've got her nailed down, she fakes me out. The Catwoman I was originally writing was much straighter than what she's turning out to be. My interpretation is partly being colored by the artwork."

Jim Balent is *Catwoman*'s penciller. He has done work on Harris Comics' *Vampirella* and DC's own *Detective Comics*. The legendary Dick Giordano is the series' inker. "Having Dick Giordano ink is the icing on the cake for me," she says. "Jim Balent draws a very, very, *very* sensuous-looking Catwoman. And at my request, we've reinstated her hair. I'm finding that a very sexy woman with a lot of hair, drawn by somebody who obviously likes to draw women, tends to spark different dialogue ideas in me than the extremely spare, bony kind of asexual punk rocker that Catwoman has been for the last few years."

Besides her work on the new Catwoman series, Duffy has done some writing for the movies, producing the final drafts of Full Moon Entertainment's direct-to-video sequels *Puppetmaster 4* and *5*. In the comics world, she has just concluded Epic Comics' *Akira*.

"The future holds for me the ongoing publication of my independent series *Nest Robber*, which I hope picks up some new readers from *Catwoman*." Three stories in the black and white *Nest Robber* series, with artwork by Japanese artist Maya Sakamoto, were published in *Dark Horse Presents*, and one issue of the comic itself has come out so far. "It's an action-adventure," Duffy says. "It's exactly the kind of work I've been doing for years at Marvel on books like *Power Man & Iron Fist*, *The Punisher* and *Wolverine*. I came up with what I thought was a great story idea, and I decided, just for once, to do it absolutely my way—pick my own artist and have complete editorial freedom." She's also working on the first six issues of *Elvira: Mistress of the Dark*.

But Catwoman remains the focus of Jo Duffy's energies. She says, "I'll think that I've got a lock on Catwoman and suddenly...She evades me as much as she does anybody else. I'm having a blast with her, because no matter how carefully I draft this thing out, it's not until I'm doing the final dialogue that I ever quite know what she's going to say. And what Catwoman says will spark a direction change in subsequent issues."

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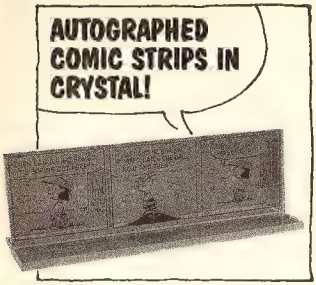

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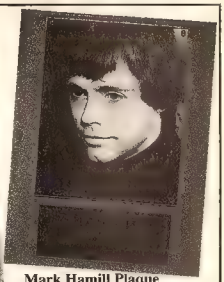

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COMICS REPORTER

COMICS screen

All of these upcoming projects are live-action unless specified. Those boxed are new or updated since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately *ever* be made.** S: script; D: director; P: producer; EP: executive producer; C: creator; AN: animated; LA: live-action; Syn: syndicated; HB: Hanna-Barbera; Nel: Nelvana; WD: Disney; WB: Warner Bros.; PP: Paramount; U: Universal; Col: Columbia; Am: Amblin; DH: Dark Horse; L: Largo; **Attn. all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016. (Info as of 8/11/93)

Shadow Art: Jim Steranko/1977 Jove Books edition

Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? Alec Baldwin knows! He's *The Shadow*.

Addams Family. Sequel. PP. Fall. AN series. ABC. HB.

The Airtight Garage. AN.

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S. Daniel.

ALIENS vs. Predator. Film. DH/Fox.

Animaniacs. AN. Fox. WB/Am. Fall.

Annie. Film. Rastar.

Archie. LA Film. DIC.

Barbarella. LA film. Nel.

❑ **Batman.** AN series. 16 more new episodes. AN film spin-off out X-mas.

Betty Boop. AN film. S: Jerry Rees. EP: R. Fleischer, R. Zanuck. MGM.

❑ **Black Panther.** Film. W/Wesley Snipes. Sony. (see item)

Blade. Film.

❑ **Blankman.** Film. C: Damon Wayans, Eric Gold. D: Mike Binder. Sony.

Blondie. Film. WB.

Bonkers D. Bobcat. Syn AN series. WD. Fall '93.

❑ **Broom Hilda.** Film. P: Ernest Chambers.

Cadillacs & Dinosaurs. AN series. Nel. CBS. Fall.

Casper. Film. Am. U.

Conan. AN TV series.

Concrete. Film. DH.

❑ **The Crow.** Film. In post-production. (see interview)

Crusader Rabbit. AN TV.

Deadworld. Film. S: Mark Pavia (D), Jack O'Donnell (P).

Dinosaurs for Hire. AN series. Fox.

Dr. Strange. Film. S/D: Wes Craven. Savoy Ent.

Doom's IV. Film. P/S: Rob Liefeld. Am.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. U.

Elektra Assassin. Film.

Exosquad. AN TV series. U. W/ Robby Benson. Fall bow.

❑ **Fantastic Four.** Film. Labor Day release.

❑ **Faust.** Film. D: Stuart Gordon. S: David Quinn.

Flaming Carrot. Film.

The Flintstones. Film. Fred: John Goodman. Barney: Rick Moranis. U/Am. D: Brian Levant. S: J. Jennewein, T. Parker, G. Ross. P: Bruce Cohen, Colin Wilson. AN TV special. ABC. Fall.

The Green Falcon. TV. Am.

The Green Hornet. Film. S: Chuck Pfarrer. U.

Incredible Hulk. Film. U.

❑ **Inspector Gadget.** LA film. S: J. Loeb II, M. Weisman. U.

❑ **Judge Dredd.** Film. Sylvester Stallone *has* signed contract to star. S: Bill Wisher.

Kull. Film. U. S: C. Pogue.

Black Panther Action

The long-anticipated film treatment of Marvel Comics' *Black Panther* has a definite start date, but that's about it, according to the movie's star Wesley (*Passenger 57*) Snipes.

"The film is scheduled to start shooting in spring '94," says Snipes, who recently finished knocking heads with Sylvester Stallone in the futuristic *Demolition Man* and co-stars with Sean Connery in this summer's *Rising Sun*. "The first script is in, and we're talking to a couple of directors. And no, John Singleton is *not* going to direct—he was never connected to the project. It was a rumor, and I think he started it," the actor laughs.

Snipes, who admits to "not being a big comic book fan," says his take on T'Challa, the noble character created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, is "to play him like that comics character.

"The intent, at least at this point, is to play him *straight*, and I like that. He's the first legitimate black, action comic-book hero. It has never been done before, which is why I think the vision in developing the character is important. I see Black Panther, a couple of films down the road, hooking up with Batman, Wolverine and a couple of cats and making things really funky."

Snipes concedes that it was ultimately the little kid in him that led him to accept the mantle of the Black Panther. "I took it," he says, "because I knew it would be fun."

—Marc Shapiro

Demolition Man Photo: Copyright 1993 Warner Bros.

Villainously blond, Wesley Snipes provides evil in this fall's *Demolition Man*. He'll get to be the hero, of course, in *The Black Panther*.

They've finally settled for a face behind Judge Dredd's helmet. It'll be Sylvester Stallone.

The Lion King. AN film. WD. Nov. '94.

Lone Wolf & Cub. Film. D: John Bruno. S: Bill Wisher.

Mai the Psychic Girl. Film.

❑ **The Mantis.** Fox TV. U. EP: Sam Raimi, Sam Hamm. W/ Carl Lumbly. For mid-season.

The Mask. Film. New Line. S/D: Chuck Russell.

The Men in Black. Film. Col. P: W. Parkes, L. McDonald.

Mr. Magoo. Film. Am/WB.

❑ **Model by Day.** TV movie. Fox. (see article)

Pagemaster. AN/LA film. Fox/HB. 1994 release.

Peanuts. LA film. P/S: John Hughes. WB.

The Phantom. Film. PP.

Plastic Man. Film. WB/Am. S: L. Wilson. D: B. Spicer.

Pocahontas. AN film. WD. Spring '94.

Prince Valiant. AN series. Family Chan. LA film. S: M. Beckner. N. Constantin Film.

Red Sonja. TV. Lancit.

Reid Fleming. Film.

Richie Rich. Film. P: J. Silver, J. Davis. S: Jim Jennewein, Tom Parker.

The Saint. Film. P: Robert Evans. S: Jeff Boam. PP.

Sandman. Film.

Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver, Bob Zemeckis. S: John Milius. WB.

❑ **The Shadow.** Film. S: David Koepp. P: Martin Bregman. D: Russell Mulcahy. W/ Alec Baldwin. Now shooting.

❑ **Sheena.** TV series. P: Paul Aratow. Col.

Speed Racer. AN TV series. Fred Wolf Films. Fall '93 bow. Film. D: Patrick Read Johnson. S: John Lawton. WB.

❑ **Spider-Man.** AN TV mini-series. Fox. Daily TV series fall '94. Film. S: Jim Cameron (D), Neil Ruttenberg. Summer '95.

Starwatcher. AN film. PP.

❑ **Superman.** TV series. ABC. Superman: Dean Cain. Lois: Teri Hatcher. Debuts fall.

Tales from the Crypt-Keeper. AN TV series. Nel. ABC. Fall.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. AN series. CBS, Syn.

Terry & the Pirates. TV.

The Tick. AN TV mini-series. Fox. Sunbow.

❑ **Time Cop.** Film. D: Peter Hyams. DH/L. W/ Jean-Claude Van Damme.

❑ **Tom & Jerry.** AN film. Due out July.

Trouble with Girls. Film. Fox. S: W. Jacobs, G. Jones.

We're Back. AN film. Am/U. Fall '93.

Wolff & Byrd. TV. Lorimar. P: Joel Simon, Bill Todman Jr. EP/D: Joe Dante. Fox.

Wonder Woman. AN TV.

Zen. Film. AN series.

❑ **Zorro.** Film. S: J. Randal Johnson, Joel Gross. TriStar. LA TV series. F. Chan. AN TV series. Nel.

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